Summer 2006

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Unions and Politics

The Crisis in Collective Bargaining

FREDERICK HESS • MARTIN WEST • TERRY MOE

IN THIS ISSUE:

Keeping Christians Out of College, Payzant's Legacy in Boston, Grading State Standards, Teacher Responsibility, Partisan Expertise

CONTRIBUTORS: LINDA KABOOLIAN, HOWARD FULLER, GEORGE MITCHELL, EVA MOSKOWITZ, LAURA LOGERFO, NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY, ALEXANDER RUSSO, GREG FORSTER

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In the new issue of the Hoover Digest . . .

How Tehran Can Yet Be Tamed

Washington should exploit the power struggle now taking place in Iran

On the surface, the regime in Tehran seems to stand together. Behind the scenes, however, a fierce struggle is under way. In one camp are Ahmadinejad and his supporters. In the other, Iran's embattled democratic movement and an array of forces that benefited from the status quo before Ahmadinejad came to power.

How can the United States exploit this struggle?

First, it should isolate Ahmadinejad and his cabal. Second, it should stimulate a serious discussion in Iranian society about the country's security interests. So far the regime has monopolized the discussion. This must end. And third, Bush should endorse the creation of a regional security organization in the Middle East. The more secure Iranians feel, the more likely the emergence of a peaceful, democratic movement.

—Michael McFaul and Abbas Milani

China and the Cure for Poverty

Acquiring wealth the old-fashioned way

China is now said to be lifting a million people a month out of poverty. You can bet the rent money that the Left will show little interest in how China is managing this feat. The Left showed far more interest in China back when it was run by Mao in far—left fashion—and when millions of Chinese were starving.

Those of us who are not on the Left ought to take a closer look. After the death of Mao, government controls over the market began to relax—first tentatively, in select places and for select industries. Then, as those places and those industries began to prosper dramatically, similar relaxations of government control took place elsewhere, with similar results.

The Chinese acquired wealth the old-fashioned way: They created it.

—Thomas Sowell

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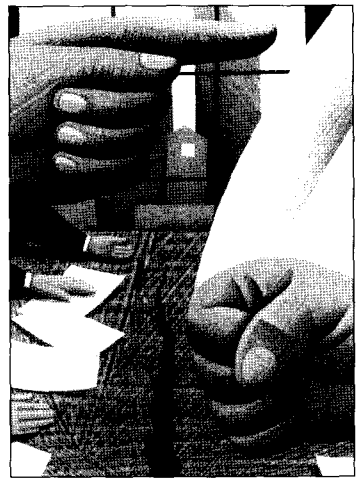

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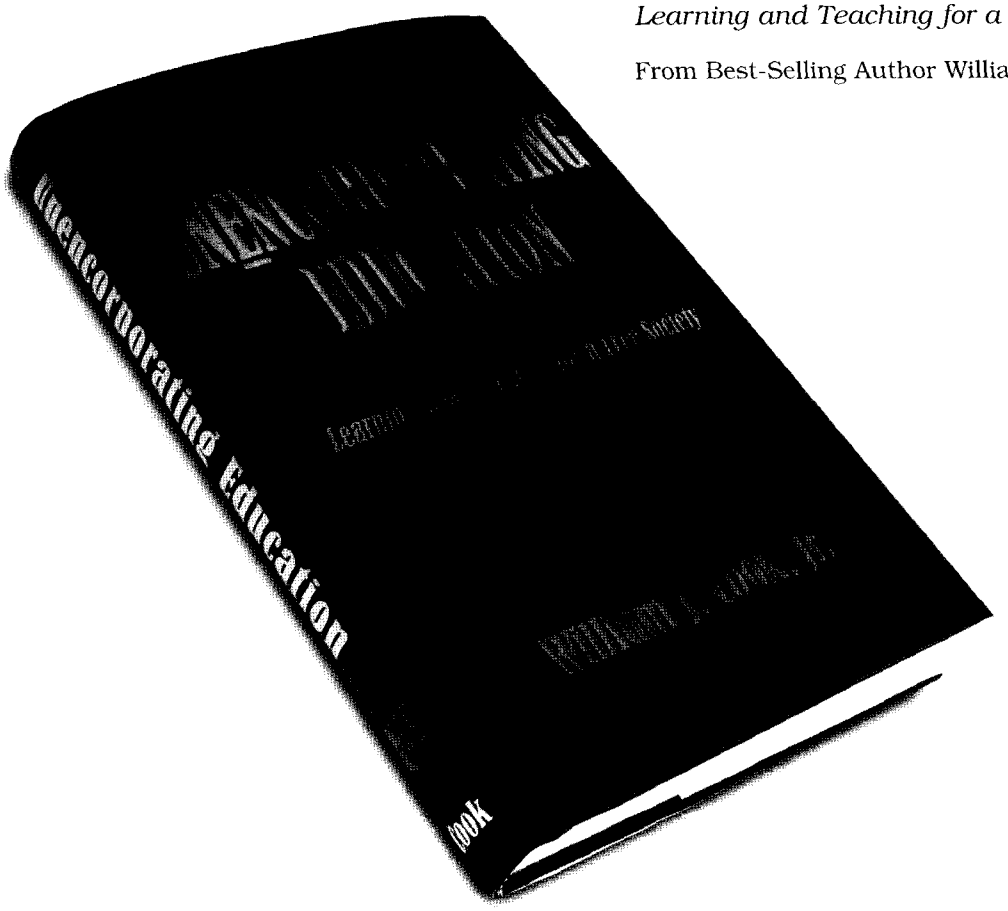

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The thesis of this book is simple: the nation's fundamental institutions, by intent or by default, have abandoned the historical Western idea of education and thus have opened the door for a hostile takeover by corporate America. The result is an educational system, if it may be so called, that has been robbed of its essential human nature (educare) and turned into a rationalized process designed to produce profitable workers, according to industry specifications. The individual is diminished to servitude; true democracy rendered impossible.

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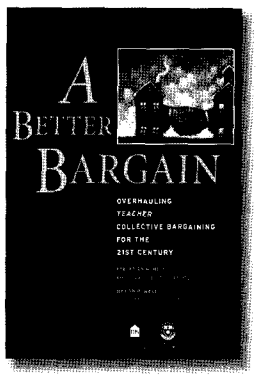
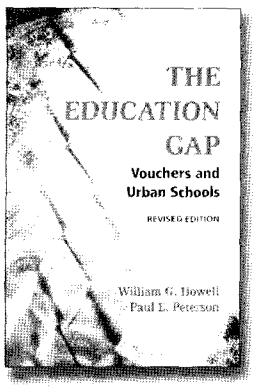


A Better Bargain: Overhauling Teacher Collective Bargaining for the 21st Century

Frederick M. Hess & Martin R. West
PEPG, 2006

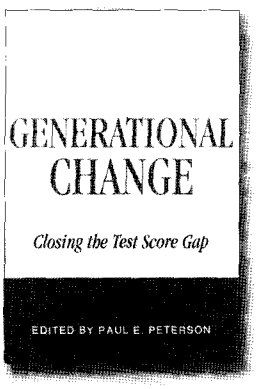
Hess and West propose an agenda for realigning the collective bargaining process so that, rather than simply serving the interests of those at the bargaining table, it is compatible with providing high quality education. The report is available at http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg



The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools (Revised Edition)

William G. Howell & Paul E. Peterson
Brookings Institution Press, 2006

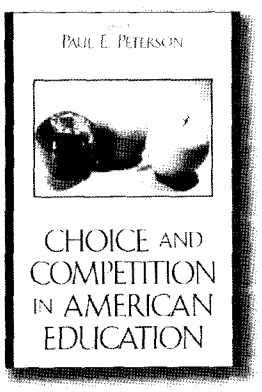
Added to the revised edition of this groundbreaking volume are the authors' insights into the latest school choice developments in American education, including new voucher initiatives, charter school expansion, and public-school choice under No Child Left Behind.



Generational Change: Closing the Test Score Gap

Paul E. Peterson, ed.
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006

The essays in this volume draw upon the best available research in considering a broad range of policy alternatives—accountability, school choice, preschool programs, and greater resource commitments—to identify what steps are needed to close the black-white test score gap within the next generation.



Choice and Competition in American Education

Paul E. Peterson, ed.
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005

In a group of essays originally published in *Education Next*, this book examines the likely promise and pitfalls of introducing market concepts to American education. Overall, these essays paint the picture of an education landscape that will be greatly shaped by choice and competition in the 21st century.

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Let the Public In

How Closed Negotiations with Unions Are Hurting Our Schools

The federal No Child Left Behind law has helped open school performance to unprecedented public scrutiny. Now it is time to bring equal transparency to the collective bargaining process.

In one of several essays in this issue addressing relations between unions and school boards, George Mitchell and Howard Fuller ("A Culture of Complaint," page 18) propose that bargaining be subject to the same sunshine laws that apply to other public business. And, in fact, in Salem, Oregon, to prevent a renewal of charges of bargaining in bad faith that both sides leveled at each other the previous year, that idea is now being tried.

In 1975, teacher labor disputes nationwide numbered 241. In 2004 that number was no more than 15.

But most everywhere else, the public is shut out of the conversation. Only when strikes occur do people glimpse what is going on. And strikes occur less often now than ever before. In 1975, when teacher unions were just getting themselves into the collective bargaining game, teacher labor disputes nationwide numbered 241. In 2004 that number was no more than 15.

Don't be misled. Strikes have not decreased in number because the unions are now docile, but because, apart from excessive salary demands, they have grown accustomed to getting nearly everything they want at the bargaining table. And school boards are accustomed to giving it to them.

Even after the negotiations are done, the agreement, supposedly a public document, can be tough to get a look at. Our office thrice asked New York City's Department of Education for a copy of the current contract, only to be directed each time to the union, which eventually mailed one to us. As a public service, we direct readers to the contract posted on the union's website (http://www.uft.org/member/rights/contracts/current_teachers_contract/), buried far from both Google's and the union's own search reaches.

New York City is one of the more accessible education redoubts. In more typical cases, school boards and local school administrators simply refuse to make the contract available. Even then, however, making sense of these mammoth documents is almost impossible for citizens who are not trained labor lawyers, which is why hearings on the New York City contract held by New York City councilwoman Eva Moskowitz were so important.

In politics, the insiders usually win the battles, and so it is with collective bargaining. Nationwide, weekly pay for teachers exceeds that of computer programmers, registered nurses, social workers, and lab technicians. Teachers' health-care and pension benefits are well above average.

If these provisions are beneficial to union members, other contract terms have clear, adverse consequences for the education of students. Agreements typically require that the worst teachers be paid the same as the best (since pay differentials are based on credentials and experience, not merit). They usually prevent principals from removing ineffective teachers without working through prolonged, tedious, arcane procedures. And the featherbedding that has been all but abolished from private industry continues within big-city school systems.

Unions make no apology for this unhappy state of affairs. "The fundamental and legitimate purposes of unions [are] to protect the employment interests of their members," says one former Ohio union official.

His point is well taken. It's the school board's responsibility to bargain with at least as much firmness as those across the table. Unfortunately, most boards are negotiating wimps, too influenced by their need to win their own reelection and keep peace in the community.

Most of all, boards hate the publicity that comes with a strike, for then they must explain to irked parents why their children are not in school. It's easier to take the broad, easy road than the narrow, conflict-ridden one.

Some say open negotiations will make it harder for union leaders to make concessions. Perhaps. But at least they would give the public a chance to know what's going on.

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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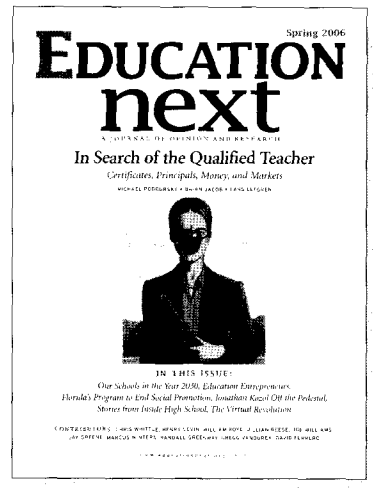
The Qualified Teacher

ichael Podogursky ("In Search of the Qualified Teacher," *features*, Spring 2006) points out that 10 percent of teachers nationwide (unevenly distributed by field and location) don't have regular state credentials. But he also maintains that the dearth of qualified teachers is largely a myth and the product of an inefficient, rigid compensation structure and meaningless certification system.

While he is correct that the certification systems in many, if not most, states have too many licensure fields and (although he doesn't say it) often lack meaningful standards, his solution is not to streamline the system and add rigor. Rather, Podgursky calls for a single license.

I for one find it difficult to imagine an individual "qualified" to teach chemistry to teenagers and reading to 2nd graders, or vice versa. His analysis ignores the extensive research base that documents the many under qualified individuals in classrooms, particularly in neighborhoods serving poor youngsters, or in fields such as math, science, and special education. But he argues that since data are mixed as to the value of the current credentialing system, we shouldn't worry about more demanding credentials. I disagree: we need to *fix* the system, not abandon it. We need rigorous standards and training, not just on the job, "sink-or-swim" induction. Children in poverty have the most to lose with his recommendations.

Podgursky also asserts that teachers are adequately paid and the overall salary of teachers is competitive. Not so says a recent study by Allegretto, Corcoran, and Mishel, who find that "teachers earn significantly less than comparable workers, and this wage disadvantage has grown considerably over the last 10 years." The American Federation of Teachers believes that if we are to attract and retain a qualified workforce, the base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In Search of the Qualified Teacher
Certificates, Principals, Money, and Markets
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Stories from Inside High School, The Virtual Revolution

salary must be competitive and, where that is the case, there is room for differentiated compensation alternatives that recognize teacher shortages in particular fields and new roles and responsibilities and performance.

JOAN BARATZ-SNOWDEN
Director, Teachers Union Reform Network of AFT & NEA Locals

Michael Podgursky replies:
I did not mean to imply that K–12 teaching should have a single license. I simply pointed out that when a state issues 200 or more separate certificates and endorsements, as is commonly the case, most school districts will be out of full compliance most of the time. A more rational system would surely involve substantial pruning, yet the trend seems to be in the opposite direction.

On the question of teacher relative pay, the earnings data reported in my study are collected by the U.S. Department of Labor directly from employer payroll offices, as opposed to the household survey data used in the Economic Policy Institute study by Allegretto, Corcoran, and Mishel. In a forthcoming article in *Education Finance and Policy*, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, Ruttaya Tongrut and I show that teacher pay estimates based on the household survey data used by these authors are unreliable and seriously under-report true teacher pay. That paper is available on my web site.

Savage Exaggerations

arcus Winters nicely nails the empirical and conceptual fallacies in Jonathan Kozol's tiresome jihads against the alleged institutional racism causing the unequal funding of schools ("Savage Exaggerations: Worshiping the Cosmology of Jonathan Kozol," *check the facts*, Spring 2006). Yet Kozol's most destructive legacy may turn out to be his attempts to convince classroom teachers that their proper role is to subvert mainstream American beliefs.

In his first book, *Death at an Early Age*, Kozol presented himself as a nonpolitical, idealistic young man shocked by a glaring injustice. But soon afterward he revealed himself as a hard-line leftist who argued that America's capitalist culture gave rise to its racist public schools. He hardened these views in (of all places) revolutionary Cuba, whose government invited him in the mid-seventies to study its education system. Kozol's account of his visit, *Children of the Revolution*, is a nauseating apologia for the Castro regime's indoctrination of children and adults. When Kozol asked Cuba's education minister why political propaganda filled Cuba's adult-literacy-course texts, he got the standard Marxist line: "All education has forever had a class bias. No society will foster schools that do not serve its ends." In his book, Kozol accepts this doubletalk as gospel and urges the reader to discard the naive view that education can be politically neutral.

Kozol's next book, *On Being a Teacher*, takes as its starting point the crude Marxist view that education in all

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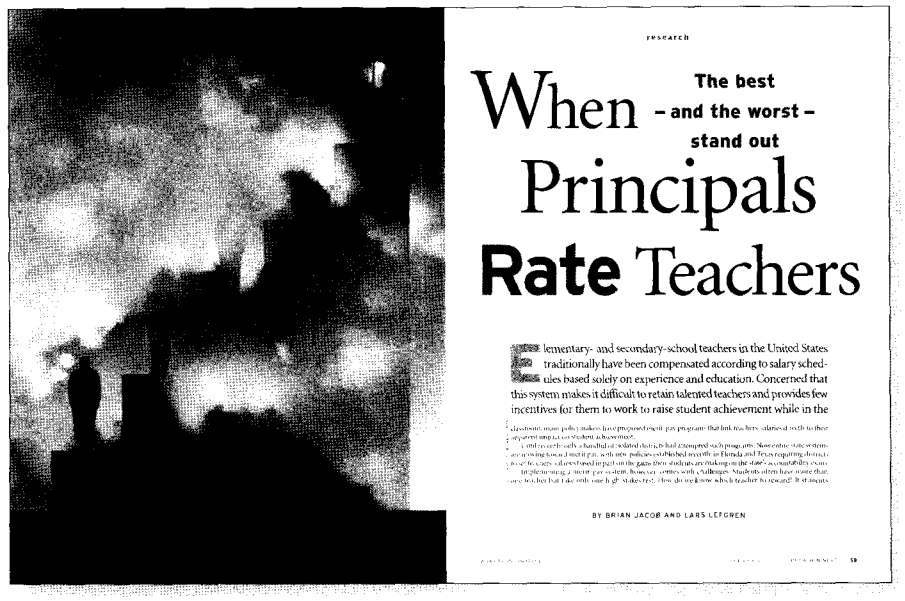
societies is "a system of indoctrination." All the book's model lessons aim to teach little children to withstand America's state-sponsored brainwashing and to open them up to the self-evident truths of feminism, environmentalism, and the Left's account of history. Kozol also thoughtfully provides a long list of left-wing publications and organizations—including the information agencies of the Chinese and Cuban governments—where teachers can get worthwhile classroom materials.

On Being a Teacher is still widely read in ed schools and by activist teachers. To the degree that teachers take to heart Kozol's vision of the classroom as an arena for political indoctrination and the deconstruction of Western culture, they limit the life chances of inner-city children. Education theories and practices inspired by another failed Marxist utopia are the last thing those children need.

SOL STERN
Senior Fellow
Manhattan Institute


research

When The best – and the worst – stand out Principals Rate Teachers

Elementary- and secondary-school teachers in the United States traditionally have been compensated according to salary schedules based solely on experience and education. Concerned that this system makes it difficult to retain talented teachers and provides few incentives for them to work to raise student achievement while in the

BY BRIAN JACOB AND LARS LEFGREN

Rating Teachers

applaud "When Principals Rate Teachers" (*research*, Spring 2006), by Brian Jacob and Lars Lefgren, and its philosophy of salary differentiation for teachers. In our No Child Left Behind era, educators are aware that high-school Algebra I teachers are under pressure for proof of student academic performance. As a high-school principal for the past nine years, I have observed Advanced Placement (AP) teachers working harder than teachers of most elective courses, but there is no bonus for them if student scores go up and there is no loss of pay if student scores go down.

Although Jacob and Lefgren's article focused on elementary-school principals, their arguments apply to any public school setting. The problem often lies with unions that want us to believe that all teachers are the same and all curriculum areas are equally challenging. Amid all the hand-wringing about the recruitment and retention of teachers, discussions typically focus on pensions and overlook consideration of a merit or differentiated pay structure that might appeal to new and seasoned teachers alike.

As an influence on student academic achievement, a teacher's years of experience may or may not have relevance.

As an influence on student academic achievement, a teacher's years of experience may or may not have relevance. I have observed teachers with 30 years of experience who avoid accountability and meaningful instruction and others who enthusiastically and consistently analyze data to ensure that their students are progressing. I would welcome the opportunity to determine who on my staff would receive differentiated pay, especially if value-added student achievement and standardized test scores are tracked as a part of the measurement. It would be a sea change of thinking in the education culture. Many of us are ready for it because it is ultimately the right thing to do for students and learning.

DOROTHY E. HARDIN
Principal, Pikesville High School
Pikesville, Maryland

Great Expectations

he National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is providing unparalleled leadership and innovation in the field of teaching. Not only have we "changed the conversation" about the teaching profession, as William Lowe Boyd and Jillian Reese note ("Great Expectations,"

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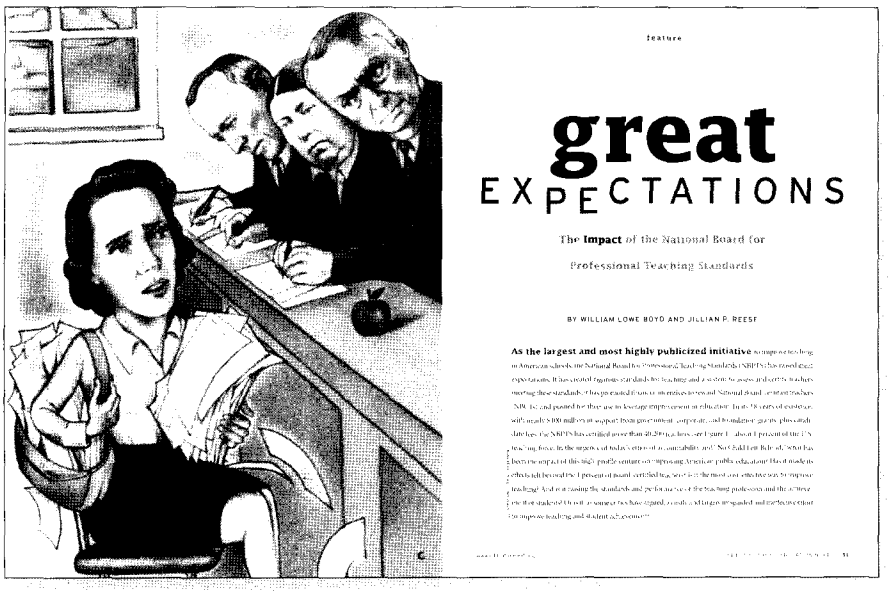

feature

great EXPECTATIONS

The **Impact** of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

BY WILLIAM LOWE BOYD AND JILLIAN P. REESE

As the largest and most highly publicized initiative

features, Spring 2006), but we are building market demand in American education by insisting on excellence that is tied to student learning.

We agree that more must be done to maximize the value of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) as instructional leaders in schools, particularly in high-needs schools. Thirty-six percent of teachers who achieved National Board certification in 2005 work in Title I schools. We are working hard to increase that percentage. Over the past year, boards in at least five states have forged efforts to attract accomplished teachers to high-needs schools.

Maximizing the influence of NBCTs, Boyd and Reese assert, make National Board certification more cost-effective. We believe it already is. Capital funding for the development of the NBPTS assessment actually totaled approximately $100 million, a significantly smaller amount than the authors assert. After taking account of the many positive effects of National Board certification, one can only conclude that it has been and will be an exceedingly valuable investment in U.S. public education.

JOSEPH A. AGUERREBERE
President and CEO
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

William Boyd and Jillian Reese have provided an excellent and balanced account of the relatively short history of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. But I would disagree with their premise that there was no demand from policymakers and the public for a means to pay accomplished teachers more than ordinary teachers.

Evidently, unions were willing to have some teachers earn more as long as everyone could trust the basis of differentiation.

For more than 100 years policymakers have advanced numerous merit-pay schemes. All failed because there was no means to measure performance that all parties could support. The key to this failure was cheap, primitive teacher-evaluation systems that failed fundamental tests of reliability and validity and, therefore, could not allow for differential rewards for teachers. The National Board devised such a measurement system that, while expensive, gained the support of teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

Evidently teachers and their unions were willing, even happy, to have some teachers earn more as long as everyone could trust the basis of differentiation. Needless to say, this is a major development. In the process, the NBPTS gave the lie to the professionally crippling belief that excellence in teaching is idiosyncratic and impossible to identify.

Now the embryonic teaching profession's advanced certification system faces a challenge unlike that faced by other established professions, many of which are using some of the very assessment procedures now being used by the NBPTS. But these other certification processes do not require external evidence of candidate impact on patients or clients. (Just how sick were the patients treated by this particular candidate for specialist certification?) Critics have set a bar for the NBPTS certification process that has never been set for other certification processes. Designing a certification process that reliably, validly and fairly produces external validation of the impact of the candidate on students erects a bar that has not been set by any other profession for its certification process.

I fully agree with the authors and the critics that ways must be found to broaden the impact of board-certified teachers. And schools must be radically restructured to take advantage of the capacities of accomplished teachers. The National Board has legitimized differentiation of teachers. Now we must break down the egg-crate organization of the schools to enable board-certified teachers to assume new roles and responsibilities.

ARTHUR E. WISE
President
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

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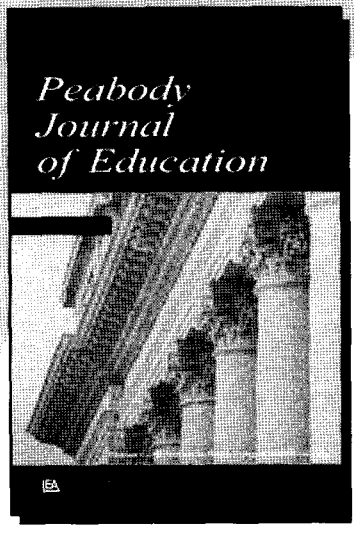

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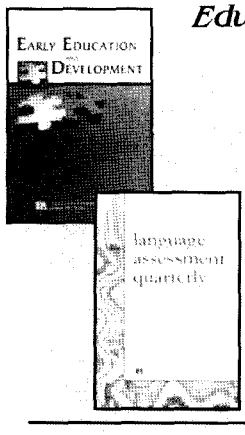

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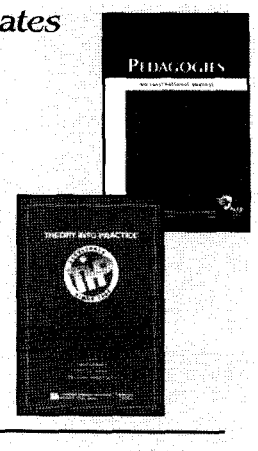

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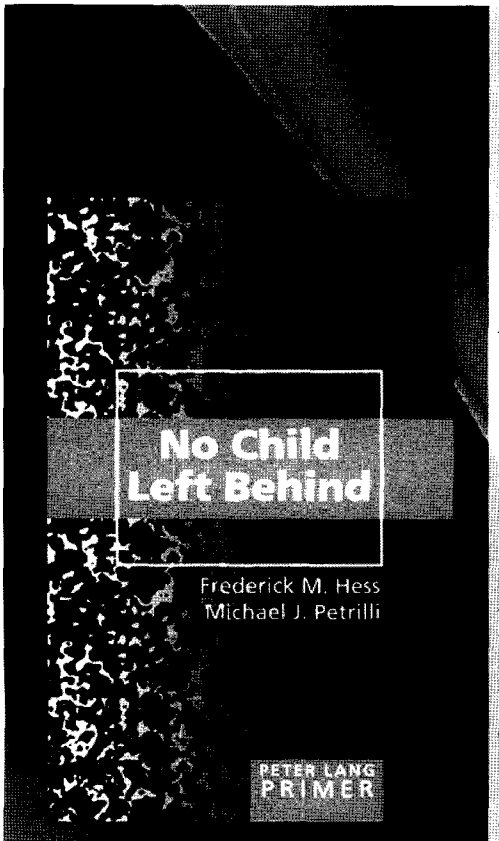

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No Child Left Behind Primer

By Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli

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No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the single most influential piece of federal education legislation in American history, and Hess and Petrilli provide a concise yet comprehensive look at this important and controversial act. Signed into law in 2002, NCLB seeks to ensure that all American students are proficient in math, reading, and science by 2014. Trumping two centuries of state primacy in K-12 education, it set standards for measuring student performance, ensuring the quality of teachers, and providing options for students in ineffective schools. The authors trace the heritage of these new policies, explain how they work, and examine the challenges of their implementation.

Frederick M. Hess is a resident scholar and Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute as well as Executive Editor of *Education Next*. His many books include *Common Sense School Reform* (2004), *Spinning Wheels* (1999/2004), *Revolution at the Margins* (2002), and *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom* (2004). He is a faculty associate of the Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance. A former high school social studies teacher, he holds an M.Ed. in teaching and curriculum and an M.A. and a Ph.D. in government from Harvard University.

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Florida Grows a Lemon

Court contortions overturn a successful voucher program

BY JOSH DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

Florida's supreme court is no stranger to political warfare. Before the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Bush v. Gore* in favor of George W. Bush, the Florida court had ruled in favor of Al Gore. And the same court played a crucial role in the state's extraction of an $11.3 billion settlement from the tobacco industry in the 1990s. After the legislature had passed a constitutionally dubious law loading the deck against the tobacco industry, the court, in a 4–3 decision, found a way to uphold it. Clearly, these judges do not recoil from constitutional constructions that suit political purposes.

Clearly, Florida's supreme court judges do not recoil from constitutional constructions that suit political purposes.

The court had no choice but to enter Florida's school voucher wars. In 1999 the legislature had created the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), which allowed students in failing K–12 schools to transfer to better public schools or to private schools with the aid of state funds. Organized teachers, school boards, and other voucher opponents brought suit. Several years of wrangling in the state's lower courts culminated in an appellate decision that the OSP was unconstitutional. The state supreme court was obliged to hear an appeal.

To strike the program down, as happened in January in *Bush v. Holmes*, the court had to do two things. It had to find that the state's constitution prohibits the use of public funds in private schools. That was the key issue. And, to avoid a bruising political battle, it had to distinguish the OSP from other, quite similar but very popular state programs that seemed to be indistinguishable in principle. With tortured logic, the court went to work.

The court focused on an article in the Florida constitution stating: "Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high-quality system of free public schools." It interpreted this to mean that "free public schools" shall be the sole way in which the state provides for children's education, although that is not what the constitution says. Seizing also on the requirement of uniformity, the court asserted that private schools are not uniform when compared with each other or with the public system. But the uniformity clause, whatever it may mean, clearly applies only to public schools.

In a brief section near the end of its opinion, the majority conceded that sometimes public spending in private schools is permissible. The court claimed that other Florida programs that permit such spending "are structurally different from the OSP, which provides a systematic private school alternative to the public school system. . . ."

But we detect no "structural" difference between the operation of the OSP and—as a leading example—the state's McKay program for disabled students, which began on a pilot basis in 1999 and as of the fall of 2005 was enrolling more than 16,000 students in private schools. In the case of the OSP, parents of children in schools that received failing grades in two out of four years were entitled to receive public funds to pay tuition at a private school. In the McKay program, parents dissatisfied with the offerings of particular public schools are entitled to move their children to other public schools or to receive public funds for use in private schools.

Of the two programs, the OSP could be thought the more threatening in the long run to the public monopoly of K–12 education. Though small, with a mere 763 students, and used almost entirely by African American and Hispanic students—in contrast to McKay's 50 percent enrollment of whites—the OSP was growing, and the court alluded to its "unlimited" potential for future growth. Also, it began with identification of failing schools rather than handicapped students, and that too, made it more threatening. Programs for a defined population can be confined—and perhaps also can more readily be grounded in a claim of rights or of equal protection. Programs that arise from failing schools are of unpredictable dimensions and are more tied to the values of "choice" and "privatization." To plaintiffs, certainly, and apparently also to the court, the OSP had the look of a "systematic" threat to public schools that needed nipping in the bud.

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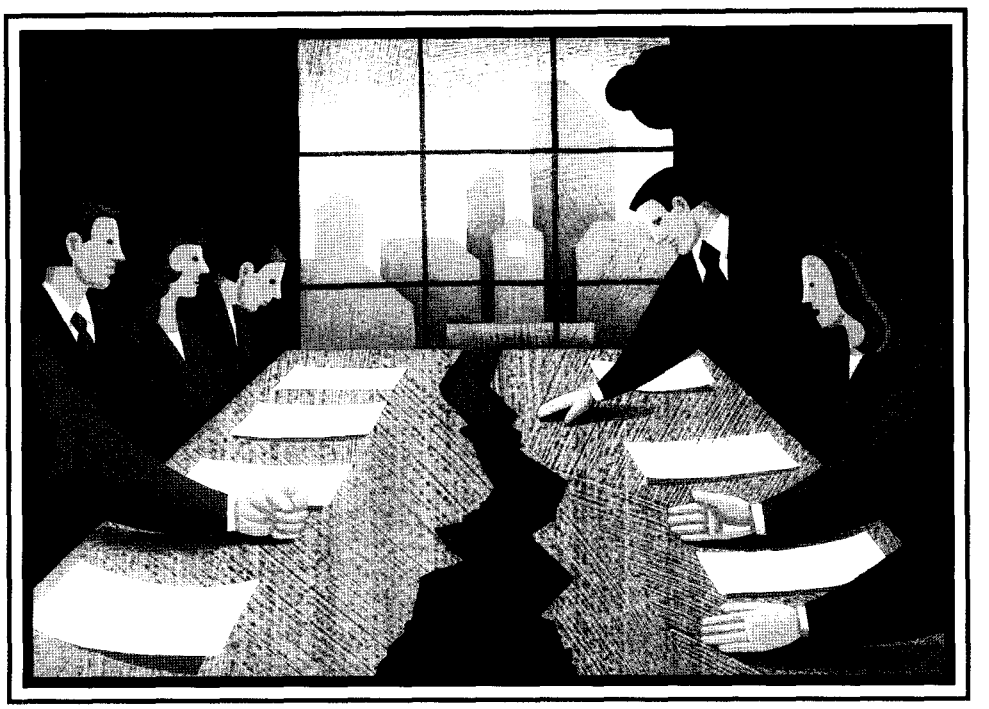

Collective Bargaining

The harsh glare of state accountability systems has brought to public attention the expansive collective-bargaining agreements that local school boards negotiate with their employees. Big-city school superintendents such as New York City's Joel Klein and Philadelphia's Paul Vallas have decried the agreements under which they have labored. In this forum Linda Kaboolian says that collective bargaining is here to stay, but offers ways to make it more educationally productive; Howard Fuller and George Mitchell lament the impediments that collective bargaining has imposed on the learning process and call for more transparency; and Eva Moskowitz, a former New York City councilwoman, wonders if the system isn't "too broke to fix."

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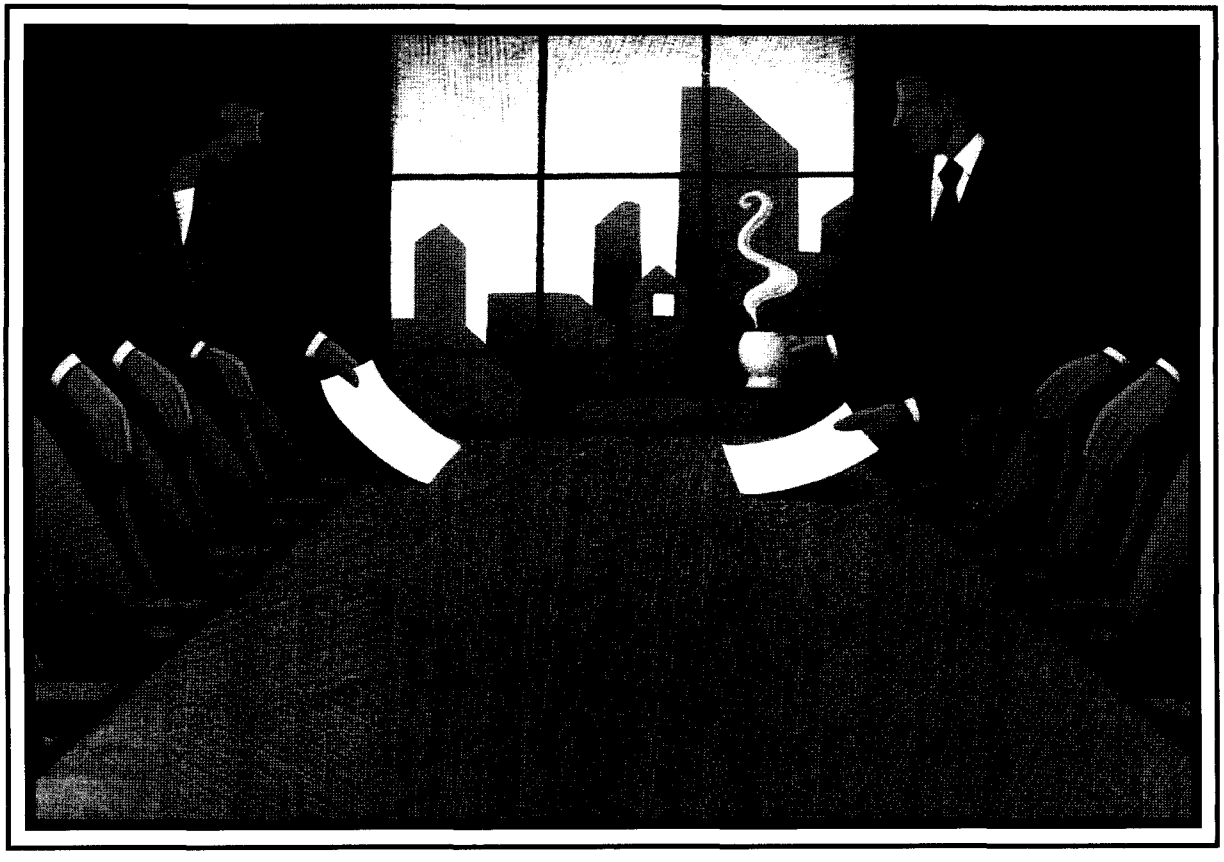

Table Talk

BY LINDA KABOOLIAN

How can we measure the effects of collective bargaining on the education of our children? Shall we look to student outcomes? Joe A. Stone of the University of Oregon says that average students do better in classrooms with unionized teachers, but less able and more able students do not. Or should we look to the economic effects? Stone says that collective bargaining increases the cost of wages and fringe benefits, but not by much. And Frederick Hess (in the *American School Board Journal*) tells us that the old chestnut about restrictive work rules limiting administrators' initiatives to improve student achievement turns out to be exaggerated; it seems to be as much a story about the differences between what administrators *choose to do* under the terms of the contract as what they *can do*. Dale Ballou of Vanderbilt agrees, arguing that administrators have more discretion than is commonly thought, though they fail to take advantage of it.

Despite this lack of empirical clarity, I'm sure many administrators and school board members feel that it would be much easier to reform public education if teacher unions would just go away. In the age of accountability, if the benefits of collective bargaining to students are not both significant and measurable, we might wonder if it is time to restrict or prohibit it.

The case for collaboration

The fantasy of union-free school districts, however, like many fantasies, rests on false premises: on the one hand a stereotype that union contracts stand in the way of education reform, and on the other, an administrators' paradise where labor markets and managerial discretion are unbridled and collective action by teachers is unknown.

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Whatever ambiguity might shroud past and current effects of collective bargaining, the future is more certain: collective bargaining and unionization aren't going to go away, and education reform wouldn't be better off if they did.

Collective Bargaining Isn't Going Away

Teacher unions and collective bargaining are here to stay, not simply because of the political clout that unions carry among elected officials or because the courts have determined that the Constitution protects union organization, but because teachers want the benefits of union membership. Eighty percent of K–12 teachers belong to a union. Meanwhile, less than 10 percent of the private sector is unionized, the lowest percentage of unionized employees among advanced industrial nations. At the same time, our country has the most restrictive laws on unionization, exempting many employees, prohibiting compulsory membership, and barring many forms of collective action (that are allowed in the European Union, for example). Public education has, by every measure, the highest density of membership and coverage by collective bargaining of any industry, public or private. Even in states where employees are covered by right to work laws that weaken unions or where other public employees cannot organize or bargain, teachers have won collective bargaining rights through local ordinances and executive orders.

Teacher unions and collective bargaining are here to stay.... Teachers want the benefits of union membership.

Teachers across the range of age and experience support their unions. A 2003 national survey of teachers (veterans and novices) by the Public Agenda Foundation shows that 87 percent of the veterans say a union is "absolutely essential" or "important," and 79 percent of new teachers feel similarly. The same percentage of veterans (87 percent) say that without a union they would be "Vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power"; 76 percent of new teachers agree. When asked about collective bargaining, 87 percent of veterans agree that "Without collective bargaining, working conditions and salaries of teachers would be much worse"; 73 percent of new teachers think so too. While the survey suggests that new teachers may demand different services from their unions and are more open to innovations such as merit pay, there is every reason to believe that these teachers intend to hold onto their union membership and collective bargaining rights.

Prohibiting unions or restricting collective bargaining will not prevent teachers from organizing resistance to managerial discretion, just as outlawing strikes by teachers has not eliminated walkouts over contract disputes. Where employees feel aggrieved, they will organize. The question is whether that organization will be regulated by laws. The labor statutes we question today evolved from the compromises made to control the chaos of unregulated collective action. For example, employers confronted by multiple organized factions within their workforce, each with its own set of demands, may see the wisdom of recognizing a single union as the exclusive bargaining agent. Employers clearly see the advantages of collective bargaining over chaos. By legalizing unions, the government assures employers that the union representatives they are facing are duly elected and are authorized to negotiate a contract that binds the members. The range of permissible topics for negotiation and collective action are defined, as are state-sponsored mechanisms for dispute resolution.

Unions as an Asset

But before we dismiss out of hand the fantasy of a nonunion world, let's consider whether there is any empirical evidence that deunionization improves student achievement. Is there any reason to believe that school administrators, free from union contracts, have either the technical or the leadership abilities to design and implement innovations? Do administrators at the school level have the capacity to provide the necessary instructional leadership? No research makes these claims.

So, if the evidence about the effects of collective bargaining on student outcomes is mixed, and teachers want union representation, and there is no good evidence about the value of alternative models of governance, then perhaps the question we should examine is, Under what conditions could collective bargaining be an asset to public education?

To understand how collective bargaining can be good for public education, we must appreciate the nature of collective bargaining. Since unions are creatures of laws that prescribe the scope and processes of organizing, they focus on adherence to the precise terms of a contractual agreement rather than on problem solving. This guarantees a rigid, adversarial posture that is unhelpful when conditions change or when management needs to make accommodations during the life of an agreement.

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Most maddening to administrators, board members, and parents is union advocacy on behalf of nonperforming teachers. How can unions justify protecting adults when outcomes for children are at stake? This posture may not be the union's preference, but it is required by law to advocate for the teacher. In the evolution of labor relations law, the trade-off for the right to exclusive representation was the Duty to Fair Representation (DFR), a demand made by forces mostly hostile to unions to ensure that the unions treated their members fairly. When it was established, DFR was seen as strengthening democracy within unions; today, it is a legal obligation that seems, in the case of the teacher unions, to hamper the rights of children.

Every teacher union officer will tell you that 5–8 percent of the members consume 90 percent of their time and the union's resources. The majority of these are people they would rather not defend. Union representation of nonperformers makes other union members angry: they may be picking up the slack for that teacher, or they're paying for that person's defense and the process denigrates the value of their performance and calls into question legitimate concerns. Nevertheless, unions have an obligation to defend the member with enough vigor to withstand a legal claim that they discriminated against the member. If the member is a racial, gender, age, or even political minority, then the claim may carry additional consequences.

Every teacher union officer will tell you that 5–8 percent of members consume 90 percent of their time and the union's resources.

Exacerbating the rigidity of the legal framework is the historic relationship between the parties. Collective bargaining agreements are often the scar tissue of the struggle between the parties' attempts to limit the arbitrary discretion of the other side. Flip through a thick contract and you'll see many examples of attempts to define transfer rights and time use. Managers want to impose rules on the behavior of teachers while maintaining maximum flexibility in deploying them as an asset. Unions want to limit the arbitrary discretion of management. Each parry and thrust becomes restrictive contract language that defines in minute detail the limits of each party's discretion until the document itself is an embodiment of the sclerosis of the relationship.

What would be the alternatives to this system? In the absence of union representation, conflicts over discipline and discharges wouldn't go away. In fact, they would become costly legal headaches only for districts rather than for unions. Districts would face the same requirements for documentation, procedural fairness, and claims of discrimination without the benefit of procedures required by a union contract. However, through collective bargaining, a collaborative approach to the problem of bad teachers has been designed. Teacher unions in some districts (such as Toledo, Ohio) have bargained a Peer Assistance and Review Program, which, over 25 years, has allowed for the firing of many tenured teachers without long waits and legal costs.

A Reasonable Alternative

What would happen if the law made student performance a mandatory subject of collective bargaining, requiring that unions, professional administrators, and school board members address this issue in their contractual relationship and holding them accountable for the results? Most likely this would require conversation about what resources would be needed to produce what outcomes, just as it does in most other forms of agreement.

Accountability raises the stakes for the participants in the collective bargaining process. Innovative deals are not going to be negotiated by hired guns, people who advertise their services based on the cost of the total contract, time to completion of negotiations, and cost of their services, rather than student performance. Contractors' interests focus on closing the deal at a fixed cost rather than on the academic outcomes the deal can achieve. The school district, as well as the local community leadership, should step up to the bargaining table, either as negotiators or as members of joint problem-solving committees, to do the hard work of designing mutually agreeable options and compromises that a good working relationship requires.

I fear, unfortunately, that a more likely scenario is one in which collective bargaining becomes yet another part of education reform policy determined by a power struggle between the usual players. Where the parties are unequal in power, the stronger side will win. If this power asymmetry is stable over time, the victorious side will dominate and get the form of collective bargaining it wants. If the power asymmetry is not stable and dominance shifts frequently, with commensurate changes in policy, then no real work on substantive issues will be done. Where the parties are relatively equal in power, there will be a stalemate with continuing but unproductive conflict *and* avoidance of any real work on substantive issues.

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Working Together for Better Schools

The only constructive alternative to these power struggles is an expansion of collective bargaining to include joint responsibility for achievement outcomes, along with balanced, shared roles in governance. In this framework, the parties are likely to identify mutual interests or accommodating agendas (such as what conditions are good for both kids and teachers) rather than focusing on the zero-sum outcomes that collective bargaining too often pursues.

Distributed leadership—that of multiple individuals, rather than one person—strengthens an organization by increasing its capacity to engage in, respond to, and institutionalize constructive change. Research from the National College for School Leadership shows that student achievement is more likely to improve when leadership involved in issues of education quality is selected from among the stakeholder groups.

Unions have an interest in good schools, and not only because students' learning conditions are teachers' working conditions.

The union plays an important role as an institutional actor when the distributed leadership model is used. Employee participation in solving problems such as how to deal with poor teaching is most likely to result in improved organizational performance if the union is supportive of the effort and involved in the design and governance of the participation mechanism. It is important to remember, however, that even changes in practices require the consent of all parties. Research on participatory schemes makes clear that the positive effects of participation are greater and longer lasting when unions as well as individual employees are involved and when the domain of discretion is expanded to include strategic issues.

In fact, there seems to be what might be called a consensus on this point across the education spectrum: In order to change instructional procedure, teachers must be active participants in the design and implementation of new practices. "At the end of the day," says Randi Weingarten, head of the powerful United Federation of Teachers, "no matter how much teachers are regulated or micromanaged or NCLBed, it comes down to the interaction between a teacher and kids in a classroom."

Even former Milwaukee superintendent Howard Fuller has said, "You don't want to be antagonistic to the teachers.... [Y]ou need effective teachers, so you have a mind-set to do the best you can for them."

Where a collective bargaining agreement is in effect, the union will insist on representing or selecting the teachers, if only to protect its role as the exclusive agent. According to James Harvey, author of *The Urban Superintendent*, former urban superintendents agree that the language of collaboration should be incorporated in the collective bargaining contracts themselves. "The contract is the union's 'sacred text,'" Harvey writes. "If it isn't in the contract, it isn't important."

These former superintendents recognize that unions have an interest in good schools, and not only because students' learning conditions are teachers' working conditions. The accountability movement now contains goals that all the parties to public education share, just as they have shared authentic concern for kids.

The reality is that unions have an institutional interest in being constructive players in education reform. A generational shift in membership is occurring with regard to issues like merit, and perhaps on the value of union membership itself. According to Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffett, in a 2003 Public Agenda report, new teachers want a more professional and issues-linked relationship with their union. Other research suggests that those teachers rank salary considerably lower than other professional concerns, including: engaging with supportive administrators, collaborating with highly motivated and effective professional colleagues, and working in mission-driven schools that share their teaching philosophies. To survive, unions have to deliver, helping teachers to be successful by providing assistance with instructional practice, facilitating continuous professional education, and meeting the requirements of an increasingly regulated profession.

Innovative collective-bargaining practices and contract language show that student achievement is recognized as important to both teachers and administrators, as well as to students, parents, and taxpayers. As a result, negotiating parties express a growing willingness to look beyond the current ways of doing things and to experiment with new working relationships. Such innovations are open to the possibility that the other side has good ideas and flexibility.

Linda Kaboolian is faculty chair of the Public Sector Labor-Management Program at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and co-author with Paul Sutherland of Win-Win Labor-Management Collaboration in Education.

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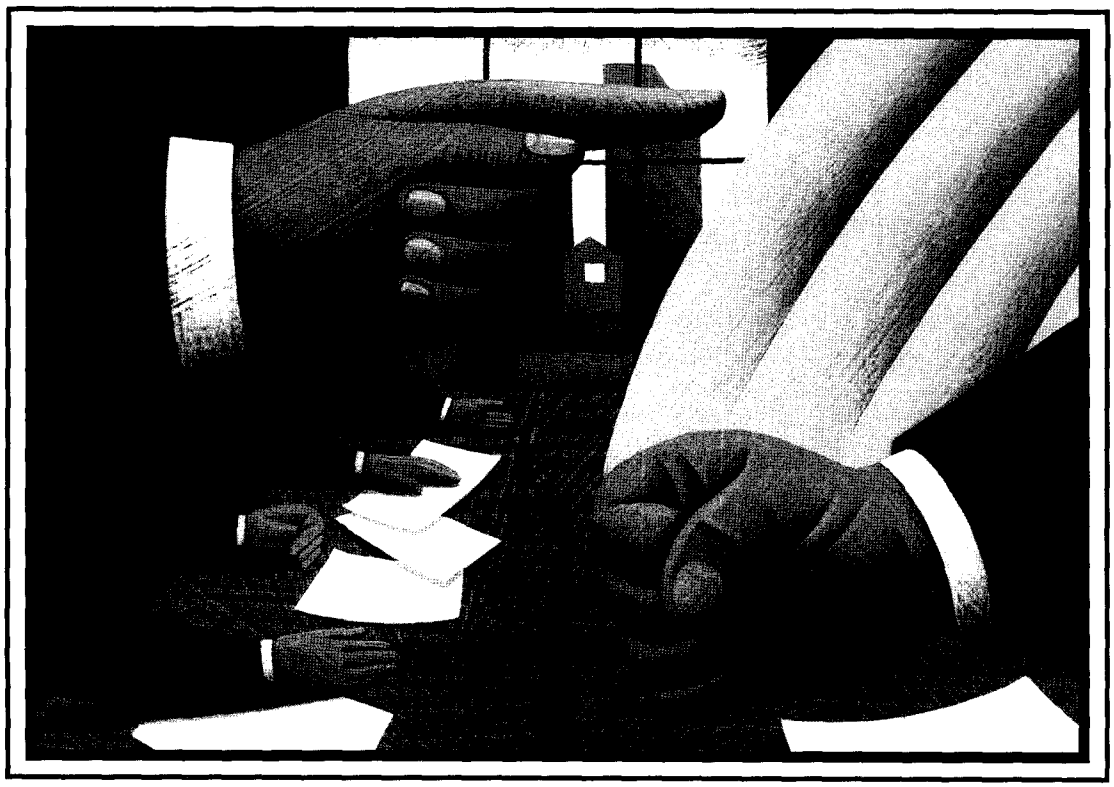

A Culture of Complaint

BY HOWARD FULLER AND GEORGE A. MITCHELL

Though the advent of collective bargaining represents a significant development in the history of American education, most research and commentary about our schools focuses on other matters. It's a curious omission, especially after nearly five decades of extraordinary union growth.

"[They] don't get no satisfaction."

As we assessed its impact for this essay, we concluded that collective bargaining is taking public education in an unsustainable direction. But rather than watching it fall on its own, bringing our education system tumbling down with it, we propose fixing it. The bargaining process needs to be more open, so the public can see how it affects our schools. And the public needs more alternatives to the methods currently used.

Let's begin by turning back the clock. What would Americans in the 1960s reasonably have expected from their public schools if they had been told that the future promised a tripling in real spending for education; a major reduction in class size; and increased job security, higher pay, and sizable new fringe benefits for teachers?

A significant gain in academic achievement would not have seemed far-fetched.

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Indeed, here is a widely discussed 1967 prediction from former teacher Robert Doherty and labor leader Walter Oberer (from their book *Teachers, Schools Boards, and Collective Bargaining: A Changing of the Guard*): If the "movement to improve the status of teachers by collective action is successful, if ... teachers ... come close to realizing what they seem to be striving toward, the concern over purely employment matters will decline. Then, perhaps, we can get on with worrying about how best to educate children.... If teacher leaders and school officials learn to use this development wisely, it may prove to be the most therapeutic educational development of this century."

Developments in American education since then have been the direct result of collective bargaining in our public school systems. Through their unions, at every turn, teachers have insisted that changes such as more money, smaller classes, and better pay for teachers were necessary if our children's academic achievement were to improve.

But better education outcomes have been elusive, at best. How long do we wait? How much more money do we spend?

Even the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) recently reported that a "sizable and growing proportion of the American public—especially in urban areas, where many failing schools are located—has lost faith in public schools and in the government bureaucracies that control them." Similarly, the National Education Association (NEA) reports, "General achievement [on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)] has increased little over the past three decades, particularly in the upper grades."

Many independent researchers, nonpartisan groups, and blue-ribbon panels, of course, have documented the prolonged stasis in the achievement data.

While teacher unions acknowledge this situation, they accept no responsibility for the loss of faith in our schools. Nor do they accept the idea that their collective bargaining might have contributed to our students' lackluster academic gains.

Yet no serious assessment can dismiss collective bargaining from the school performance equation. And it is increasingly understood that teacher unions play a major role in electing the citizens who govern school districts (see Terry Moe, "The Union Label on the Ballot Box," page 58), thus allowing them to wield power both inside and outside the classroom.

Bargaining and related union activity ... have introduced practices into the education system that are counterproductive.

Serious discussion of policies or programs rarely occurs without taking into account the local union contract and the position of union officers and member teachers.

Salaries and benefits, the largest share of school spending, are now negotiated. So, too, are teacher qualifications, the basis for teacher assignments, and other fundamental terms of teachers' employment. Just 50 years ago, such decisions were dictated largely by district superintendents and elected school boards.

More Achievement? Or Less?

Some would argue that our children's academic achievement would be worse without collective bargaining. Their hypothesis: districts with collective bargaining foster good salary and benefit structures, enabling more qualified teachers to be hired.

Union leaders also would likely conclude that their substantial political influence has blocked measures that would harm schools. The AFT, for example, says many politicians offer "quick-fix reforms" that would "hurt teachers." It asserts, "Conservative ideologues have [offered] proposals to privatize or dismantle the entire system."

Our research leaves us highly skeptical that collective bargaining has improved academic achievement. Indeed, the Milwaukee experience suggests the opposite conclusion. From observing conditions there and in other cities, we believe that bargaining and related union activity have not only hampered urban public schools with such things as cumbersome contracts, but have introduced practices into the education system that are counterproductive, fomenting a demoralizing pattern of acrimony between teachers and administrators that is fundamentally at odds with effective education.

Collective Bargaining in Milwaukee

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) entered the collective bargaining era in 1964. Five years earlier, Wisconsin had become the second state, following Connecticut, to establish collective bargaining rights for teachers and other public employees.

An 18-page school-board resolution defined the initial relationship between the MPS and the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA). And following a pattern seen in

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most urban districts, this has evolved during subsequent decades into a 232-page contract with more than 2,000 additional supporting documents, including grievance-arbitration rulings, memoranda of understanding, and state declaratory rulings (see Figure 1).

The result? An endless debate about what is and is not allowed in the daily governance of the school system and the creation of an environment where the interests of students are routinely subordinated to those of adult teachers. Several examples from Milwaukee illustrate the problem.

- Following a successful union grievance, the MTEA advised members that a principal "*cannot* require a faculty to submit lesson plans weekly nor on any other periodic basis." A principal "may *occasionally* check the lesson plans of all teachers." (Emphasis in original.)
- The MTEA once alerted members that "some principals have attempted to require teachers to attend additional meetings before and after school to write goals and objectives.... [A contract amendment] should be negotiated if MPS wishes to ask teachers to perform these services."
- Another MTEA advisory warned: "Some administrators need to be reminded of the two-and-one-half-hour monthly limit of faculty meetings/in-service. Furthermore, if a ... meeting will last longer than one hour, the administration is required by contract to notify teachers of the date and expected duration at least one calendar week in advance."

These examples reflect a system where sound education planning is secondary to the maze of rules and time limitations established for the convenience of teachers. But even more egregious was the union's effort, in 1988, to thwart legislation adding 20 minutes to the instructional day. "With an increase of 20 minutes, it [will] be necessary to work the emergency makeup day if there is a snow day closing," read the MTEA's report on the negotiations. "In order to avoid this impact on a separate provision of the contract the MTEA and the school board agree to *add another 5 minutes of student instruction time without further lengthening the teacher day.*" (Emphasis added.) With similarly impenetrable and convoluted prose, the union's report clearly showed how collective bargaining trumped the simple goal of providing a meaningful increase in instructional time. And we see again how "bargaining" can undermine the most basic of education objectives.

Milwaukee, unfortunately, is not an exception to the rule. A 2003 survey of urban public-school superintendents that one of us (Fuller) conducted for the University of Washington found that more than two-thirds of the

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administrators in states with collective bargaining said union contracts impede reform. One superintendent cited a "150-page contract [with] over a thousand rules," adding, "You have Gulliver and the Lilliputians. You've got a thousand of these little ropes. None of them in and of [itself] can hold the system down, but you get enough of them in place ... and the giant is immobilized."

Inflexible staffing rules are among the "ropes" cited most often by superintendents. A 2005 New Teacher Project report concluded, "These rules undermine the ability of urban schools to hire and keep the best possible teachers."

NEA president Reg Weaver called the Teacher Project report "just another smokescreen to blame so-called 'union rules' for our society's lack of commitment to all children." His rhetoric underscores the gulf between the outlook of unions and that of superintendents.

Acrimony

Former NEA president Robert Chase once worried that "industrial-style, adversarial tactics" conflicted with education reform. But he wasn't speaking of the heated, intemperate comments and stern rhetoric that occasionally can be part of the process. He was referring to an almost relentlessly negative aura in discussions between management and union.

Again, Milwaukee's experience provides apt examples of the unproductive rancor. A 1970 union memo suggested: "The Board and the administration intend to force an all-out confrontation with the teachers in an attempt to nullify the teachers' bargaining power." A union newsletter in the 1980s described a negotiating session thus: "The board's team members ... sat in comfortable swivel chairs. The chief negotiator looked 'managerial' in his new suit and tie.... On the other side of the large room at the MPS administration building, the MTEA's team seems to overcrowd its side of the table. Smaller chairs; no coffee; no water; no amenities." In 1986, a former MTEA president made a presentation to the school board that included such lines as, "I tell you, you are destroying us," and "I'll tell you, you are beating your teachers down and we are getting discouraged."

Such commentary has epitomized the MPS-MTEA relationship for four decades. Though the MTEA and its members have achieved many of their stated goals, the union mainly fosters a posture of discontent. We are unaware of any organization that can continue to achieve its goals in such an environment.

The Outlook

The educational and fiscal consequences of bargaining as practiced in the past four decades appear unsustainable. Citizens have tripled their investment and yet, as the AFT concludes, many have "lost faith in public schools."

In Milwaukee, by the time students enter their sophomore year, taxpayers have invested about $100,000 per pupil in their education. Real per-pupil costs have quadrupled since collective bargaining began. The student-teacher ratio has declined from 26:1 to 16:1. Yet only one in five black MPS sophomores is proficient in math or science. Fewer than

Hard Labor (Figure 1)

Since the 1960s, the size of the contract between the Milwaukee Teachers Union and Milwaukee Public Schools has grown dramatically.

SOURCE: Howard Fuller, George Mitchell, and Michael Hartmann, "Collective Bargaining in Milwaukee Public Schools," in *Conflicting Missions: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform*, Tom Loveless, ed. (Brookings, 2000)

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four in ten are proficient in reading. The Schott Foundation for Public Education has issued the numbing finding that "nearly three-quarters of the black male students (in the MPS) fail to graduate with their (9th-grade) cohort."

Fiscally, even an increase of 20 percent in real per-pupil spending in the past decade has not forestalled program cuts and the elimination of many teaching positions. An examination by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* links these cuts directly to collective bargaining. The costs of fringe benefits, the newspaper reported, "have spiraled out of control." The paper cited the "decision to sweeten an already lucrative pension program in 1998 [as] a classic example of how public employee benefits are enhanced, often with privileged insiders pushing for the deal, and little study in advance." The paper further observed that the union had "successfully pushed for benefits increases" and had "lobbied and made campaign donations to School Board members who have ultimately approved higher benefits."

The monopoly status of public education has insulated it from the difficult adjustments occurring in most other sectors of the economy, including many sectors that rely on unionized labor.

Will there be a similar day of reckoning in public education? We believe the question is when, not if. Eventually, in our view, there will be insufficient public support and capacity for continuing a system that uses more and more resources without commensurate results.

Bargaining sessions should be public. The specifics of union contracts are one of the least reported ... aspects of American education.

This outlook is not shared by teacher unions. An Associated Press report quotes the NEA's Weaver: "Issues such as classroom size and adequate funding come before improving test scores."

If a tripling of expenditures and a significant reduction in the student-teacher ratio is not enough, what "input" would be sufficient for Weaver? Or is the answer always to be "more"?

Recommendations

What can we do? Two things, we believe, will start to bring the system back into a sustainable orbit: a dramatic expansion in the range of education options available to parents and a fundamental change in public access to the collective bargaining process.

The first part of our proposal is patterned on America's system of higher education, where colleges and universities provide a wide array of choices that help students determine which college or university they may attend. While access to higher education is still far from ideal, the range of options is substantially greater than in K–12 grades. If barriers to parent choice at K–12 schools can be reduced, all sectors of the education market may become more responsive, as Milwaukee shows.

Second, we do not propose the end of bargaining, but we do argue for greatly increasing the public's awareness of it. Mike Antonucci, a prominent analyst of teacher union activity, explains how the current system puts the general public at a disadvantage: "The 'closed door' nature of contract negotiations applies equally to both sides, [so] it seems like an equitable (if less than sensible) restriction. But it isn't, because the school board is representing the general public. The union is not.... Teachers are kept well-informed of the status of negotiations while the public—supposedly represented at the table by the board's negotiators—is not. And, unlike teachers, citizens don't get a contract ratification vote."

We believe bargaining sessions should be public. The specifics of union contracts are one of the least reported, yet most important, aspects of American education. With the general public largely shut out, the result is the uneven playing field Antonucci described. In Wisconsin, legislation would be required to achieve transparency; currently, if one party requests that the negotiations be private, that prevails. We propose altering those terms so that either party can stipulate that the negotiations be public.

Increased public awareness could change the situation dramatically. The news media need to push aggressively for greater public access to the bargaining process. This would go hand-in-hand with expanding education options for parents. In the final analysis, more parental freedom to choose and a more open collective bargaining process surely would produce better results. Without such change, the unacceptable education outcomes that characterize the era of collective bargaining will continue, especially in urban districts.

Howard Fuller, a former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, is director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University. George Mitchell is a Milwaukee-based researcher.

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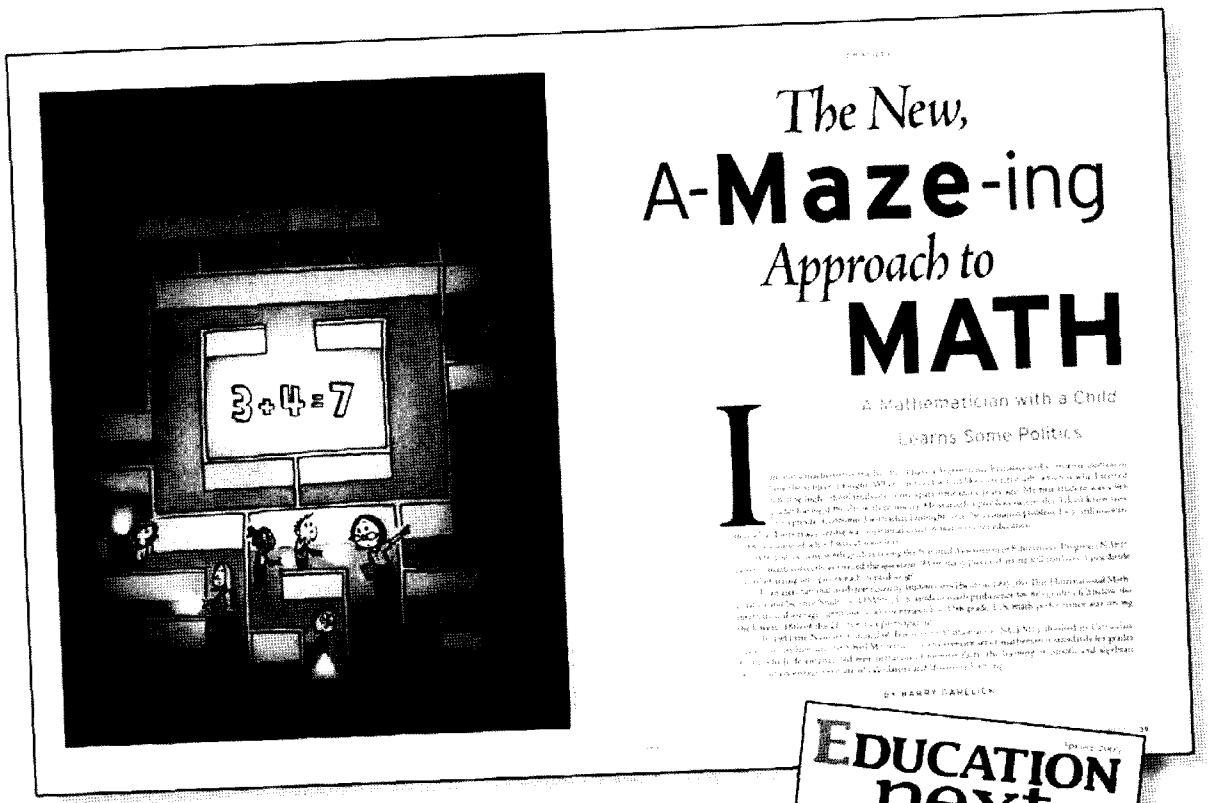

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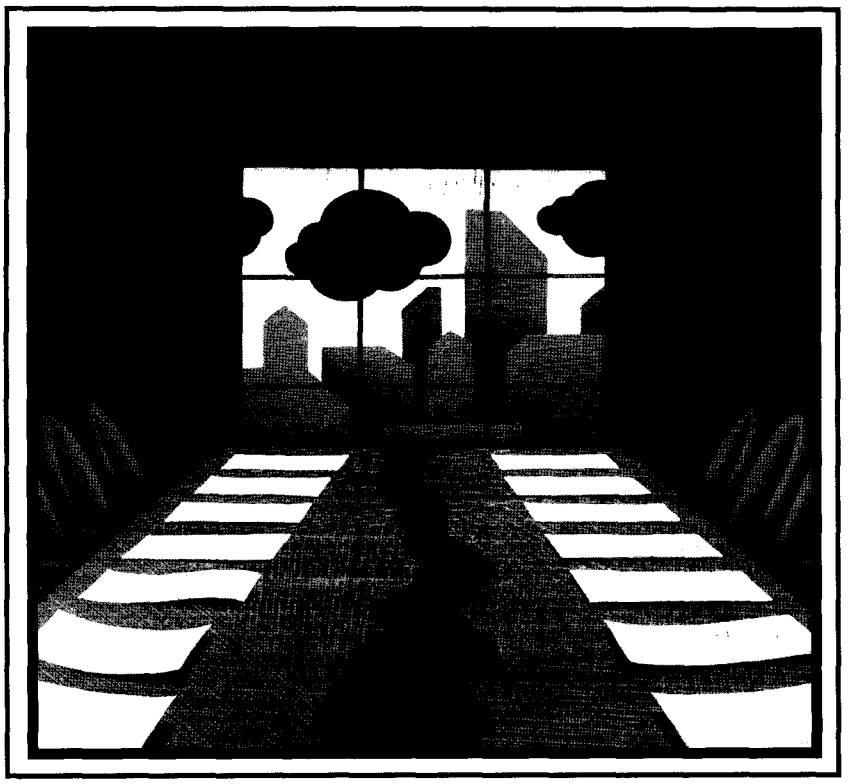

Breakdown

The ten-foot rule and other fine points of collective bargaining in New York City

BY EVA MOSKOWITZ

The multiplicity of ills facing our nation's public schools can depress even the most optimistic. How can we be hopeful when we have 30 million illiterate children? And it is no longer just the well-being of our poorest children that we need worry about; our top-performing public schools are no match for the international competition. China and India, among others, will finish our lunch if we do not find a way out of our education quagmire.

My views on how to solve some of these seemingly intractable education problems have been informed by two experiences: my four years as chair of the New York City council's education committee and, more recently, my role as founder and executive director of a new charter school. During the years I spent as a public school student in the city, my time teaching social studies to public school students, and now my experience as a public school parent, I have seen a great deal. But one of the most striking phenomena I have observed is the education industry's ability to preclude any dramatic improvement in the schools. It is a monopolistic structure in which management and labor have colluded for the better part of four decades to protect the interests of adults over those of children. The labor agreements signed by both public

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officials and labor leaders, governing every aspect of New York City public schools, profoundly inhibit our ability to improve public education. The complicity between management and labor must end if we are to improve learning and teaching and have a chance at competing in the global economy.

I do not oppose some of the commonly proposed solutions to our education failures. I support universal pre–K, reduced class size, year-round schooling, and career ladders for teachers. Money matters, terribly. Just look at first-rate private schools: in New York City parents spend between $20,000 and $40,000 per child, and they do so for a reason.

But if we don't end the collusion among those in power, more money won't matter. The problem with the Soviet Union was not its leaders or its employees; it was the closed, uncompetitive economic system that stifled innovation. We have the Soviet equivalent in our schools; it's a system that shuns competition and thwarts change. But in America it's the collective bargaining agreements that are the glue keeping the monopoly together.

I came to these conclusions about the school system and the negative effects on it of the labor agreements after spending three months reading and rereading the long and complex union contracts for teachers, principals, and custodians in preparation for five days of public hearings. In my capacity as chair of the education committee, I also produced what amounted to Cliffs Notes of these documents (see sidebar). The public can now turn to three slim volumes (approximately 20 pages each) to understand the different work rules and fundamental provisions of the contracts instead of having to plow through more than 1,000 pages of fine print.

The teacher union contract is more than 200 pages long; with the side agreements and laws that supplement it, it grows to 600.

The Long and Longer of Union Contracts

The teacher union contract is more than 200 pages long; with the various side agreements and state laws that supplement the terms of the contract, it grows to 600. These pages determine nearly every aspect of what a teacher does, and does not do, in a New York City school, and what can and can't be done to them. For example, a high-school teacher in New York City cannot be asked to teach for more than 3.75 hours per day.

Nor can a teacher be asked to help supervise a lunchroom or study hall, help special-education students on and off the bus, help college applicants prepare their transcripts, score city-wide tests, or write truant slips. One New York City teacher cannot be paid more, or less, than any other teacher at the same level of seniority, regardless of the particular teacher's talents and effort or the difficulty of recruiting a teacher for a hard-to-find position such as math or science. The right to hire or not to hire a teacher is limited by teachers' "transfer rights," which gives them first choice on a place in another school. The right to fire a teacher is limited by teachers' "retention rights" and a complex and lengthy set of due process procedures. Assistant principals have similar rights.

In short, although principals are supposed to be the CEOs of their schools, they have little control over their management teams. Hiring, firing, promoting, setting compensation, determining work hours and assignments, setting requirements and expectations: these powers, taken for granted in most organizations, are, for all practical purposes, outside the purview of a principal.

This is as true for maintenance as for instruction. The school custodian presides over his (there were no women at the time of my hearings) own domain, even though it is the same building that the principal is supposed to run. The school custodian has his own budget (computed from a complex set of rules and algorithms that factor in the size of the building and amenities like pools, escalators, and gyms) and hires his own staff, which does not technically work for the city. The custodial staff doesn't work for the principal, who must get permission from the custodian to keep a building open beyond the regular school day.

Many custodians are quite entrepreneurial, but the system's incentives tend to channel this entrepreneurial spirit in directions that are less than optimal, for taxpayers at least. Since a principal has no power to fire a custodian, the best way for a principal to get rid of a bad custodian is to give him high marks so that he can transfer to a larger building, where, according to the contract, he automatically earns more money. Thus is incompetence rewarded. By the same token, to keep a good custodian, a principal will give him mediocre marks, penalizing competence. Think of it as the Peter Principle on steroids: custodians are promoted from jobs they can't do to those they can't do even better.

As with other New York City school employment contracts, myriad work rules limit the activities of a custodian. However, the custodians aren't complaining. Thus they sweep, but they

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The Crib Sheet

During the hearings I conducted for the New York City Council in November of 2003, I prepared summary notes of the thousand-plus pages of union contracts dictating the education parameters of our public schools. Following are excerpts from my notes (with references to page numbers in the appropriate contract):

Salary of Custodians

Custodians are entitled to keep whatever money they do not spend from their annual lump-sum allotment, up to a "Maximum Permissible Retainage" (MPR) of around $85,000. There are exceptions to this limit:

"Custodial Engineers employed in buildings of 247,000 square feet and above, as of November 1, 1994, who receive an outstanding performance rating of an average of 4.00 on a 1–5 scale shall be exempt from the MPR limit..." (p. 8).

"Any Custodial Engineer who transfers to a school over 247,000 square feet after December 31, 1995, shall be eligible to be exempt from the MPR after a new and separate evaluation period where he must receive an overall average rating of 4.00" (p. 9).

The School Day

The school day is 6 hours and 40 minutes, except for schools that have extended their school day. During that day, middle-school and high-school teachers can be programmed to teach for no more than five periods per day (approximately 3.75 hours) and for no more than three consecutive teaching periods (approximately 2.25 hours). Elementary-school teachers teach slightly longer, a 4.5-hour portion of the day (pp. 20, 26).

Making an Exception on Teacher Salary

Although most teachers are paid based on their position and seniority, exceptions are possible when responsibilities exceed ordinary duties. But a higher salary cannot be set until:

1. An audit is conducted;
2. The Division of Human Resources reviews the audit;
3. The UFT (United Federation of Teachers) is consulted;
4. The chancellor approves the salary; and
5. Any disagreement is arbitrated (pp. 64–65).

Steps for Giving a Teacher a Poor Performance Rating

Under the contract, a principal can give an unsatisfactory ("U") rating to a teacher at the end of any school year, with or without providing interim feedback or support. Typically, however, a principal may first informally speak to a teacher who has performance problems and suggest ways to improve, perhaps through counseling memos "or other non-disciplinary means" (p. 128 and Memorandum of Agreement). The principal's authority to do so is limited, however.

A principal may also seek a formal conference with the teacher or attempt formal peer intervention (p. 132). This process is repeated as often as the principal deems necessary and can spare the time to do it. If these steps fail, the teacher eventually receives a "U" rating.

After a teacher receives a first "U" rating, the teacher cannot transfer to another school and must be offered professional development to improve performance. If problems persist, the cycle of documenting problems continues and, if no improvement occurs by the end of a second year in the classroom, another "U" rating is given.

— Eva Moskowitz

don't vacuum. This particular rule created a big problem because the chancellor mandated "reading rugs" in all elementary-school classrooms so that children could sit on the floor. When he learned that the custodians wouldn't clean them, the chancellor and the deputy mayor were forced to negotiate a "rug cleaning policy." Unfortunately, those long and complex negotiations (memorialized in a two-page, single-spaced memorandum of understanding) turned out to be for naught because the contract protected custodians' right to limit their cleaning responsibilities.

Other limitations abound. A personal favorite of mine is the ten-foot rule, which I learned about when I asked why school walls frequently seemed to be painted only to a certain height; above that line and on the ceilings, the paint was often peeling. Why? Because the contract says custodians cannot be asked to paint above ten feet. The painters union has another collective bargaining contract … which is another story.

A final twist to the already contorted custodian incentive system can be found in the "custodian trust fund," a term of some amusement once you understand how it functions. According to the contract, if the custodian can maintain his building to a standard that *he* judges satisfactory, without using all of his budgeted funds, he can simply keep the remainder. You'd be amazed what a custodian would consider satisfactory in these circumstances.

Unfortunately, perverse incentives such as these are not limited to teachers and custodians. School principals, whose union contract is a slim document (150 pages) by New York City union

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standards, also work by rules that reward uniformity before excellence. Principals are paid in lockstep, regardless of their performance, abilities, or even the size of the school they oversee. Their agreement also spells out in mind-numbing detail the circumstances under which a superintendent can relieve a principal of his or her responsibilities. Tenured principals have to do something truly egregious to be fired. The process for removing a principal begins with sending letters of complaint to the personnel file, any and all of which can be appealed by the principal. The process, if successful, can take as long as 150 days, which is most of a school year. By the same token, even small procedural details in the contract can have profound effects on the operation of a school. Principals and assistant principals, for instance, are not required to notify superintendents in advance of their retirement, a circumstance that can create significant disruptions. You can "retire" in the middle of the year and head off to Bermuda, as my son's principal did, without any penalty or deduction from the pension.

Remarkably, while the school system purports to hold children to a standard of excellence, principals can be removed only if they engage in "persistent educational failure." Intermittent failure or persistent mediocrity is perfectly acceptable.

If the custodian can maintain his building to a standard that *he* judges satisfactory, without using all his budgeted funds, he can keep the remainder.

The Way Out

Recently I had the opportunity to begin seeing things from a slightly different perspective. As a legislator, I looked at the language of the labor agreements and concluded that their provisions impede our ability to educate children. Now, as the director of a school, Harlem Success, I see that the major education questions cannot even be asked within the confines of labor agreements.

At Harlem Success, for instance, we know that our most important resource is our teachers, so we have extensive internal discussions about how to pay them in a way that most benefits our kids. We are asking whether a teacher with three years of experience should be paid more than a teacher with two years of experience. What about someone with 20 years of experience? In determining salaries, should we place as much value on five years spent at another school as five years spent at our school? None of these questions about compensation can be asked by schools subject to the teachers contract. The contract preordains every decision about compensation that a school leader would want to make. Those givens can only be changed every few years when the contract is up for renegotiation and when the mayor and the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) complete their political dance.

While employment contracts make it almost impossible to redesign a traditional school around the needs of students, we can do that redesign at our charter school. Harlem Success kids will have a school day of 8 hours and 40 minutes, compared with 6 hours and 40 minutes in the traditional public schools, because we determined that that was the amount of time the kids needed. In an effort to determine our core competencies, we are asking whether it makes sense to have extracurricular activities, such as supplemental sports and art classes, taught by the school's teachers or contracted out to nonprofit groups who may offer these services at reduced prices and provide higher-quality services. Even seemingly small decisions such as the number of minutes for science instruction cannot be made in traditional public schools because they are fixed by the contract. At Harlem Success, we determined that our kids need 60 minutes for science labs, rather than the 50-minute periods prescribed by the union contract, and so they got them.

As we have been thinking through all the education questions, I am struck by the fact that we couldn't even be posing these questions if we were constrained by the labor contracts governing the regular public schools. Our hands would be tied by the contracts and by the powerful precedents that enshrine them in stone even in the face of so-called negotiations. There is no doubt in my mind that we will be able to do a far better job educating our students because we are free from these constraints. That is important to me, not least of all so that I can keep my job. My one-page contract, which I negotiated and drafted myself, states: "I will serve at the pleasure of the Board as an at-will employee."

Eva Moskowitz, former member of the New York City Council and chair of its education committee, is executive director of the Harlem Success Charter School.

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Keeping an Eye on State Standards

A Race to the Bottom?

BY PAUL E. PETERSON AND FREDERICK M. HESS

Checking for truth in advertising; are proficiency levels meaningful?

While No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires all students to be "proficient" in math and reading by 2014, the precedent-setting 2002 federal law also allows each state to determine its own level of proficiency. It's an odd discordance at best. It has led to the bizarre situation in which some states achieve handsome proficiency results by grading their students against low standards, while other states suffer poor proficiency ratings only because they have high standards.

A year ago, we first sought to quantify this discrepancy ("Johnny Can Read ... in Some States," *features*, Summer 2005), showing which states were upholding rigorous standards and which were not.

We return to the subject now, with the latest available data, to update our ratings. The standard we again use is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's "report card," and still the only metric that allows strict comparisons between states. For each state where both NAEP and state accountability measures were available, we computed a score based on the difference between the percentage of students said to be proficient by the state and the percentage identified as proficient on the NAEP in years 2003 and 2005.

We are not evaluating state tests, nor are we grading states on the performance of their students. Instead, we are checking for "truth in advertising," investigating whether the proficiency levels mean what they say. We are thus able to ascertain whether states lowered the bar for student proficiency as the full panoply of NCLB provisions took effect.

When we conducted the first of our checkups on the rigor of the standards, we gave each state the same kind of grade students receive. Where the requisite information was available, states with the highest standards were given an A; those with the lowest standards, an F. Last year, the requisite data were available for only 40 states. This time around, 48 states have been graded, including nine "new" states providing the necessary information for the first time (see Figure 1). While the fact that these nine are now in compliance with NCLB is a laudable accomplishment, it is not clear how committed they are to the enterprise: among the nine, only the District of Columbia and New Mexico scored a grade higher than C, and Nebraska, Utah, Iowa, Oregon, and Nevada could do no better than a mediocre C or D. The first grades garnered by Alabama, Nebraska, and West Virginia were D minuses. Clearly, student proficiency has entirely different meanings in different parts of the country.

Meanwhile, five states that previously had their accountability systems in place are letting their standards slide. The biggest decline was in Arizona, with significant drops also found (in order of magnitude) in Maryland, Ohio, North Dakota, and Idaho. If parents in these states read that students are making great strides on state proficiency tests, they would be advised to consider the message with a healthy dose of skepticism. At least some of the reported student gains appear to be the product of gamesmanship.

In addition, states with already low standards have done nothing to raise them. Oklahoma and Tennessee once again share the cream puff award, with both states earning Fs because their self-reported performance is much higher than can be justified by the NAEP results. States with nearly equally embarrassing D minuses included Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina. Once again, we discover that Suzy could be a good reader in North Carolina, where standards are low, but a failure in neighboring South Carolina, where standards are higher.

Still, there are happier stories to tell. Montana is the most improved state. Others that have significantly boosted their proficiency standards relative to the NAEP include Texas, Arkansas, and Wisconsin.

Best of all, a handful of states continued to impress for a second consecutive year, grading their own performance on a particularly tough curve. Massachusetts, South Carolina, Wyoming, Maine, and Missouri all once again earned As, along with newcomer Washington, D.C.

Shining a light on the standards that states set is crucial, as it helps remind state officials that there is a right way and a wrong way to ace a test. Of course, having high standards is not enough. It is the crucial first step, but the next, and more difficult one, is to make sure that a high percentage of students reach that standard. In that regard, all states need to do much better, if no child is to be left behind.

Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess are editors of Education Next. *Mark Linnen provided research assistance.*

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Grading Procedure

In 2003 and 2005, both state and NAEP tests were given in math and reading for 4th-grade students. The grades reported here are based on the comparison of state and NAEP proficiency scores in 2005, and changes for each are calculated relative to 2003. For each available test we computed the difference between the percentage of students who were proficient on the NAEP and the percentage reported to be proficient on the state's own tests for the same year. We also computed the standard deviation for this difference. We then determined how many standard deviations each state's difference was above or below the average difference on each test. As with last year, the scale for the grades was set so that if grades had been randomly assigned, 10 percent of the states would earn As, 20 percent Bs, 40 percent Cs, 20 percent Ds, and 10 percent Fs. Each state's grade is based on how much easier it was to be labeled proficient on the state assessment as compared with the NAEP. For example, on the 4th-grade math test in 2005, South Carolina reported that 41 percent of its students had achieved proficiency, but 36 percent were proficient on the NAEP. The difference (41 percent − 36 percent = 5 percent) is about 1.4 standard deviations better than the average difference between the state test and the NAEP, which is 31 percent. This was good enough for South Carolina to earn an A for its standards in 4th-grade math. The overall grade for each state was determined by taking the average for the standard deviations on the tests for which the state reported proficiency percentages.

— Paul Peterson and Frederick Hess

Strength of State Proficiency Standards, 2005 (Figure 1)

	4th grade		8th grade		OVERALL GRADE		Percentile
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	**2005**	2003	Change
Massachusetts	A		A	A	**A**	A+	+5.9
Maine	A	A	A	A	**A**	A	+0.9
South Carolina	A	A	A	A	**A**	A	-0.7
District of Columbia	A	A	A	B+	**A**		new
Wyoming	A	A	A	B	**A**	A	+1.7
Missouri			B	A	**A**	A	0
Hawaii	C+	B	A	A	**B+**	B	+2.1
California	B	B	C+		**B-**	B	-6.6
Arkansas	B+	C	B	B	**B-**	C+	**+10.8**
Rhode Island	C	B+	C+	B-	**B-**	B-	-3.5
New Mexico	C+	C	B-	B	**C+**		new
Kentucky	C			B-	**C+**	B-	-2.8
Montana	C	C+	B-	C	**C**	C-	**+28.7**
Florida	C	B	C	C-	**C**	C	-0.9
Washington	C-		B-		**C**	C+	-6.7
Nevada		C+		C	**C**		new
New York	C	B+	D-	C	**C**	C	-4.5
Oregon		C		C	**C**		new
Pennsylvania		C+		C-	**C**	C	+1.5
Ohio	C	D+	C+	C	**C**	C+	**-15.2**
New Jersey	C-	C	C-	C	**C**	C	+1.7
North Dakota	C	C	C-	C	**C**	C	**-13.3**
Illinois		C-		C	**C**	C	-8.2
Louisiana	C-	C	C-	C-	**C**	C-	+6.7
Connecticut	B-	C-	C-	D	**C**	C-	+6.4
Maryland	D+	C	C-	C	**C**	C+	**-23.2**
Delaware		D		C	**C-**	C	-3.8
Indiana	C	C-	C-	D	**C-**	C-	-0.4
Michigan	D+		C	C-	**C-**	C	-6.6
Kansas		D+	C-		**C-**	C-	-7.3
Wisconsin	D+	D	C	D+	**C-**	D	**+11.3**
Iowa	C-	C	D+	D	**D+**		new
Arizona	C-	D+	D	D+	**D+**	B-	**-44.5**
South Dakota	D	D+	D+	C-	**D+**	C-	-2.3
Utah	C-	D	C-	D	**D+**		new
Alaska	D	D-	C-	C-	**D+**	D+	-0.3
Texas	D+	F	D+	C	**D+**	F	**+17.9**
Virginia		C-		D-	**D+**	D+	-2.1
Idaho	D	D	D-	D+	**D**	D+	-8.4
Colorado	D+	D-	D-	D	**D**	D	-2.6
Nebraska	D	D-	D-	D-	**D-**		new
Alabama	F	D	D-	D-	**D-**		new
Mississippi	F	C-	F	D+	**D-**	D-	+1.3
Georgia	F	F	D	D-	**D-**	D-	+1.4
West Virginia	D-	F	D-	F	**D-**		new
North Carolina	D	F	D-	F	**F**	D-	+0.7
Oklahoma	F	F	F	F	**F**	F	-1.1
Tennessee	F	F	F	F	**F**	F	-0.2

Note: Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Vermont did not test students in the 4th or the 8th grade in 2005. No grade means either state scores or NAEP results were unavailable.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on state tests and NAEP

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In a national landscape dotted with dysfunctional urban school systems and short-lived superintendencies, the Boston Public School district (BPS) and its superintendent, Tom Payzant, both stand out. With over a decade at the helm, Payzant is arguably the best big-city school leader in the nation and Boston the most improved urban district. This June he retires.

The Bostonian

BY ALEXANDER RUSSO

The success side of the Payzant story is known to many. Academic progress in Boston increased steadily under his leadership, with Boston's 4th and 8th graders handing the 65-year-old Boston native a nice farewell gift by coming out on top in math improvement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2005 assessments among ten participating urban districts (see Figure 1). Boston public school students are also among the top (along with San Diego and New York) in making the most overall progress over the past two years, outperforming students in Atlanta, Cleveland, and Chicago. Boston has a smaller gap than most other urban districts in achievement between white students and black and Hispanic students. On state tests, Boston's scores have almost kept pace with the state average since the tests were first given in 1998. The district has been a finalist for the Broad Foundation award for urban school districts for each of the past four years.

Payzant himself has won numerous awards, including state and national superintendent of the year. He was recently named one of *Governing* magazine's public officials of the year—the only school official to be so recognized. He has been praised for his intelligence and his doggedness, traits that many believe are key to understanding his success over almost 40 years as an educator.

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PHOTOS BY LANA KURTZ

Tom Payzant's Focused Approach to School Reform

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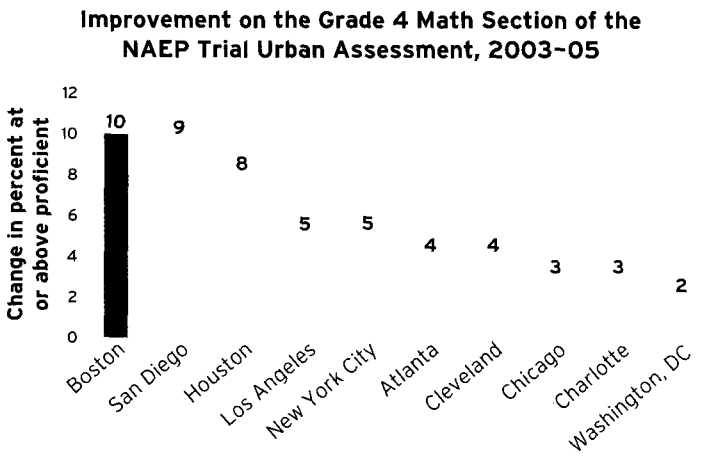
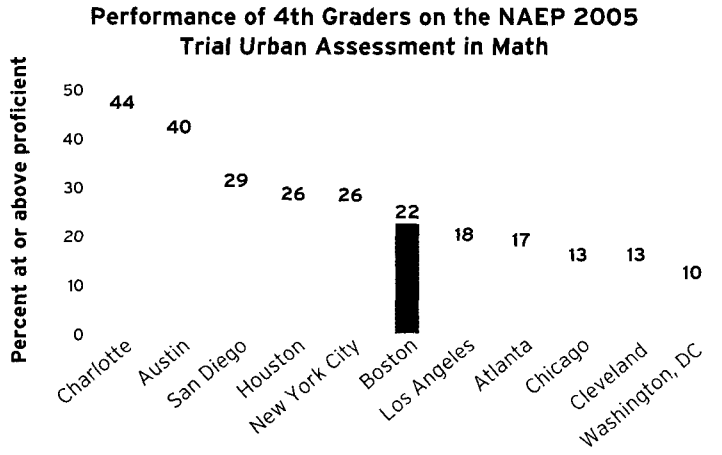
Average or Above? (Figure 1)

The scores of Boston students improved the most on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial Urban District Assessment in mathematics between 2003 and 2005.



However, the math scores of Boston students still hover in the middle of those for other urban districts.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, "Trial Urban District Assessment"

He reads voraciously and responds to an enormous amount of e-mail. His stamina has abandoned him only once, five years ago, when he fell ill with viral meningitis and had to take a few weeks off to recuperate. A grandfather of five, Payzant is still working long days, nearly every day of the week, right up to retirement.

For his hard work and depth of knowledge, Payzant is admired almost universally in mainstream education circles. "Everybody likes Tom a lot and really respects him," says Harvard Graduate School of Education professor Susan Moore Johnson. "I don't think there's any doubt that the district is better off for having him here."

But even in the praise there is a hint of what it is about this Harvard-educated superintendent that frustrates people. "Many people would like the pace to quicken here," says Moore Johnson, who calls herself a Payzant supporter. "I think people would like to see more improvement on test scores, stronger schools, and more autonomy given to those schools that are performing well."

Indeed, the most common criticism of Boston's improvement—and Payzant's leadership style—is that there isn't more of it; the changes have been "incremental," suggesting that he could have made more substantial, dramatic, or even radical changes, but instead made only small moves that produced marginal achievements (see Figure 2).

And so a question lingers: Could Tom Payzant have done more? Other, more flamboyant and hard-charging district leaders, like former San Diego superintendent Alan Bersin and former Chicago superintendent Paul Vallas, have come and gone (some of them, like Vallas, popping up again in new locations), while Payzant remained. And yet, the appeal of the hard-charging noneducator (think Roy Romer in Los Angeles) remains powerful.

As it turns out, the questions often have as much to do with expectations thrust on him, and the differing ideologies surrounding school reform, as with Tom Payzant himself or the results that he did and did not achieve.

These questions certainly aren't parochial or relevant to Boston alone. Many other major school districts are currently trying to decide whether to find someone who can emulate Payzant's focused strategy or someone who is going to break down doors and take few prisoners.

A Life in Education

Born Thomas William Payzant on November 29, 1940, in Boston, a third-generation French-American (via Nova Scotia), the future educator moved to nearby Quincy in his early years. He attended public school there until his mother packed him off to the private Mount Hermon School for Boys, founded by famed Protestant evangelist Dwight Moody (in 1881). Payzant says he considers it a great sacrifice on his mother's part to send him to Mount Hermon, in part because it meant she was left alone at home. Payzant's father died when he was six. At the school, Payzant says he learned the value of hard work, as all the students had duties, in addition to their classwork, cleaning bathrooms and waiting tables for faculty in the dining hall.

From Mount Hermon, Payzant decamped to Williams College, where he earned a bachelor's degree in American history and literature. He moved back to his native Boston, to receive a master's in teaching, then a doctorate in education from

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Harvard in 1968. He began his teaching career just a few miles away at Belmont High, then went west with his new wife, also a teacher, to Tacoma, Washington. The couple's first child was born there in 1964, but in 1969 Payzant was tapped for his first district leadership position and came back east to take the reins of a small, 4,500-student school district in Springfield, Pennsylvania. He was just 28.

For the next ten years, Payzant cut his teeth as a superintendent all over the country, moving from Springfield to Eugene, Oregon, to Oklahoma City, then to San Diego. In southern California he tested the tenets of longevity as a tactic in school leadership, staying in San Diego from 1982 until 1993, about the same amount of time he would preside over Boston schools.

One of the main things Payzant says he learned from his San Diego experience was how to deal with issues of race, class, and culture when there are more than two dominant racial groups in the community. This would prove helpful in Boston, where long-established African American and Hispanic communities have in recent years been joined by immigrants from the Caribbean and elsewhere.

In San Diego, he also had his first taste of continuity. "San Diego had a five-member elected board, but the board that hired me did not turn over until I was there for seven years," says Payzant. "It turned over one board member at a time."

Taking the Reins in Boston

Payzant returned to Boston by way of Washington, D.C., where he had a two-year stint as an assistant secretary in Bill Clinton's Department of Education, helping to write and then to persuade Congress to pass the Improving America's Schools Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization that was the immediate predecessor of the No Child Left Behind Act. He also endured a brutal confirmation process focused mainly on his decision to deny the Boy Scouts of America access to San Diego school facilities for their ban on gay scout leaders.

While Payzant's time in Washington was relatively brief, it gave him lots of practice working in a very political environment. "It is tougher to be an urban superintendent than an assistant secretary in D.C.," says Payzant. "But I was better prepared for Boston and the complexity of the city and its politics than I would have been if I had come to Boston directly from San Diego."

When he arrived back home in 1995, 26 years after leaving, Payzant was a veteran superintendent with a clear vision of what he wanted to do:

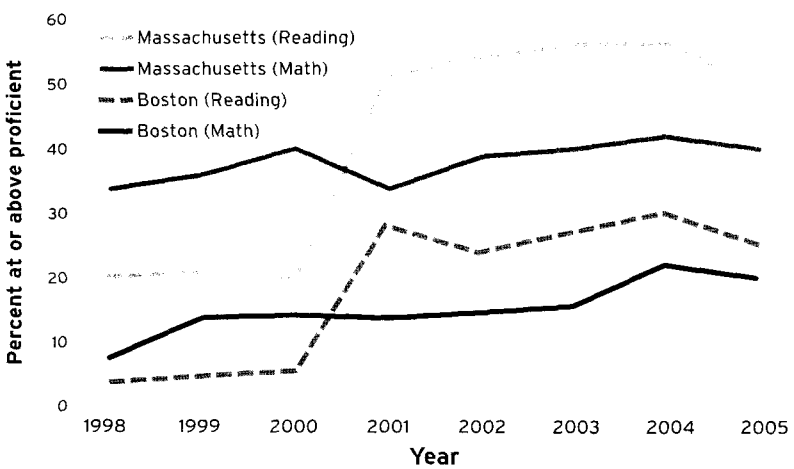
"I came to Boston to see whether or not you could lead a midsized urban school district toward systemic reform," says Payzant. "I wanted to create a whole system of schools that would be improved, so that my legacy would not be a few more good schools."

Thus began Payzant's relentless focus on a small set of interconnected instructional issues, a strategy of implementing a few ideas carefully and thoroughly so that they would, like the proverbial stone dropped in the water, ripple throughout the system. Over the next decade Payzant would create new programs only when needed and only for a specific purpose. This is a stark contrast to the modus operandi of many urban superintendents, who roll out new initiatives nearly every year, stretching district resources (and credibility) along the way. "Nearly everything Tom does is purposeful, and planned for, and executed very, very well," says Robert Peterkin, director of Harvard's Concentration on the Urban Superintendency. "It's just very, very thorough."

Just Keeping Pace (Figure 2)

Over the past seven years, the test scores of Boston Public Schools 4th-grade students have improved at about the same rate as those of the average Massachusetts 4th grader.

Performance of 4th Graders on the MCAS Math and Reading Sections, 1998–2005



Note: New performance standards for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) reading section were established in 2001. Independent of any real improvement between 2000 and 2001, the proficiency percentage for Massachusetts increased by about 30 percent; for Boston the increase was about 20 percent.

SOURCE: Massachusetts Department of Education

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Payzant says he learned how to deal with issues of race, class, and culture during his tenure in San Diego, like Boston, a city with more than two dominant racial groups.

During his first five years as chief of Boston schools, Payzant focused the district on literacy instruction, creating a new team of literacy coaches who worked with classroom teachers in a small set of schools, using money freed up from an "audit" of professional development endeavors that revealed too many disparate efforts around the district. The coaching program was later expanded to include math as well.

Payzant would go on to encourage teachers and principals to use test data and develop formative assessments for use throughout the year. He also pushed for a gradual narrowing of curriculum options for most schools. Instead of letting each teacher in each school come up with his or her own curriculum and approach, resulting in an incoherent and in some cases ineffective system of instruction, Payzant gradually narrowed the range of options for schools and teachers to materials and teaching strategies that he and his teams of coaches thought worked best for Boston students. This included pacing guidelines and home-grown efforts to improve principal and teacher preparation.

Payzant created one of the nation's only in-house teacher training and certification programs, the Boston Teacher Residency, through which the district prepares a small but growing number of teachers largely independent of traditional colleges of education.

Along the way Payzant fired seven principals, not all of whom went easily. His district-wide curriculum prescriptions would also eventually engender a certain amount of pushback from the teachers union. In the early years he tried to close a school, but was forced to relent in the face of community opposition. At one point he threatened to decline outside funding that did not match his collaborative, focused vision for the district. In this endeavor, he eventually prevailed. More recently, low initial pass rates by high-school students on state exams led to calls for him to criticize the state standards and exams, which he refused to do.

Throughout, Payzant's concentration has been on a small set of classroom and "schoolhouse" issues including school leadership, instructional capacity, and quality curriculum, combined with a careful approach to implementation.

The Perks of Perseverance

The intensity of Payzant's vision did much to undo the resistance and cynicism of career educators who had seen many superintendents—and many short-lived initiatives—come and go. He was also at the helm long enough for educators to see that he was not going to go away and was not going to change his focus from year to year. He returned to the same issues of instruction and curriculum year after year, adjusting and correcting along the way, but always moving consistently forward along a narrow path.

And his longevity had other benefits as well: private funds (estimated at $100 million over ten years) poured in from education foundations looking for a district with stable leadership. Along the way Payzant cultivated a generally positive relationship with the wide variety of education groups in and around Boston, including the local teachers union. Key among nonunion groups to support him was the Boston Plan for Excellence, an organization that grew in part out of the 1993 Annenberg Challenge and continues to receive funding from that foundation. Run for many years by Ellen Guiney, a former education advisor to Senator Ted Kennedy, the Plan (as it is known) has helped develop pilot schools and administer several of the district's initiatives, such as the literacy coaching program and the teacher preparation program.

"The hard part is not inventing new things but translating what the standards are into actual instructional supports that can work at scale," says Guiney. Payzant was "lucky enough to be given the first four or five years, but also brave enough to do a few things at a time and not try and be a big glitz."

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Payzant is dogged, persistent, and—to use the term many use to describe his focus—"technical." He's that much-maligned thing: a traditional educator, a professional who communicates most, and best, with other educators.

He avoided significant resistance from teachers by being very careful in the materials he required and approaches he implemented, trying out his ideas on a small set of teachers and schools, and making adjustments as needed, before rolling them out district-wide.

Only of late, after a change in union leadership, has the Payzant method come in for criticism. Richard Stutman, current president of the Boston Teachers Union, recently called the Boston curriculum that Payzant helped create "one-size-fits-all."

Turnover at the top and well-warranted resistance from the bottom are often cited as reasons that progress has been so slow in so many big cities. Today the average tenure for urban superintendents is only two and a half years, according to a Council of the Great City Schools report that surveyed big-city school leaders. Just 14 percent of urban superintendents last more than five years.

Built-In Advantages

Some Payzant critics—and even he has them—believe that the veteran superintendent's accomplishments must be viewed in the context of the relatively good hand he was dealt in Boston.

For starters, they say, the district is small; fewer than 150 schools and 60,000 students make it much more manageable than Chicago, for instance, which has some 600 schools and more than 435,000 students. In fact, Boston ranks number 67 in the nation in enrollment, and its student poverty rates—73 percent—are lower than in many other urban districts (Chicago's is 85 percent). Boston does not suffer from a tremendous falloff in student spending and teachers' salaries compared with neighboring districts. The average teacher's salary in Boston is almost $79,000. Average spending per pupil was about $10,000 in FY2003, according to the district—just $500 less than nearby Brookline and more than $1,500 more than the statewide average.

Payzant also benefited from a 1993 state education overhaul, which, among other things, took principals out of the collective bargaining process and gave the superintendent control over administrative appointments. This allowed him to transfer and fire administrators and principals as needed, without involving the board or having to deal with a collective bargaining agreement.

The 1993 state law also called for new standards and test-based accountability for student achievement—an approach that fit well with Payzant's background in Washington.

Finally, since 1991 Boston schools have been controlled by the mayor, who appoints school board members and the superintendent. Mayor Tom Menino, first elected in 1993, chose Payzant for the schools job in 1995. In ways large and small, Payzant and the Boston Public Schools were protected by Menino, elected to his fourth four-year term in 2005, throughout his tenure as schools chief.

Such a close relationship with the mayor was not always a plus, however, especially from the perspective of those who felt Payzant could have taken better advantage of that liaison for the benefit of the schools. According to John Mudd, senior project director for Massachusetts Advocates for Children and perhaps Payzant's most vocal critic, the mayor gave Payzant nearly everything he could ask for: "continuing support, freedom to create education policies, to hire and fire people, and help fighting for city budget support even in a time when our state hit hard times. And he didn't try to meddle. Given the ten years," says Mudd, Payzant "could have—and should have—done more."

The Stealth Radical

It is a testament to Payzant's skills as an education diplomat that he survived despite the length of the various "wish" and "to do" lists that others had for him. The things still undone after 11 years include a relatively small but stubborn achievement gap, a high dropout rate, and struggling programs for English language learners and special-education students. Compared with 2003, the 2005 NAEP showed that the achievement gap broadened in 8th-grade math and 4th-grade reading. Minority enrollment in the city's three exam schools and preparation programs is also declining, though this appears to be because of a legal mandate to drop affirmative action programs.

For reform-minded educators to the center and right of the political spectrum, calling Payzant's efforts a success refutes the notion that radical changes are needed to improve

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Whatever his flaws, no other big-city superintendent seems to have done a better job steering an urban district in the right direction.

urban education. He was never the type of reformer to talk about "blowing up" the system or "turning things on their head" to achieve laudable ends. "No doubt there is a sense of urgency that needs to be created around the gaps that exist in urban school systems," he explains. "But there's not a lot of evidence that the strategy of trying to blow up a place and start over will get the long-term results that can come from continuity of leadership."

School closings, new-school creation, merit pay for teachers, technology initiatives, and other common stand-ins for innovation have been few and far between under Payzant's tenure. He hasn't spent a lot of time trying to take on union work rules that affect transfers, overtime, and, to some extent, recruitment and diversity. And he hasn't focused very much attention on school choice and competition, key issues for conservative and centrist reformers alike. As of 2005–06, there are just 16 charter schools in Boston, all authorized by the state, and 19 "pilot" schools, which are charter-like schools created in partnership between the district and the teachers union. The union blocked the expansion of pilot schools for two years—a move that Payzant complained about but did not take dramatic action to undo.

For these reasons, Payzant gets a mixed review from pro-choice reform groups like the Pioneer Institute. "He's been tentative on choice issues," says the institute's executive director, Jim Stergios, citing Payzant's refusal to push for more charters and his slowness in expanding the student assignment system used to determine where children attend school. "But he's been very good about expanding the number of pilot schools, and the small steps he's taken, combined with the stability, have had a big cumulative impact on the school system here."

His approach seems also to have disappointed some liberals and progressives, for whom the fact that he has made so much progress without a strong commitment to parent and community engagement is troubling. Payzant hasn't gotten deeply involved in community issues, and in fact admits that the racial divide that long dominated Boston school politics before his arrival was one of the main considerations he had before taking the job. His slowness on this front is widely cited among community and minority leaders as a Payzant fault. Even his supporters concede that Payzant has moved too slowly. "It is his fault," says Guiney about community and parent engagement by the district. "He kept trying, but he never got it quite right. It has taken too long." This concern and others detailed in a recent Aspen Institute report on Payzant's tenure are already issues in planning for Payzant's successor.

In the end, there is no real way to know what might have been. Of course, Payzant might have gotten a lot more done had he pushed harder or worked more closely with community groups; at the same time, he might have gotten a lot less done—and helped fewer schools make progress—had he rolled out half-baked initiatives or gotten himself fired.

"He could have made a lot of bone-headed decisions," says Guiney. "No matter what the situation, he still had to be able to deliver."

And he did. In fact, since he did reform the school system without always appearing to, he has earned a reputation for what one former Payzant deputy called his "stealth radicalism."

Whatever his flaws, no other big-city superintendent seems to have done a better job steering an urban district in the right direction. For reformers on both sides, the underlying problem may be that Payzant simply doesn't fit the current vision of school district leader. He's white and male. He's a career educator, not a former general or federal prosecutor or governor. He is smart and articulate, but not media hungry. Though capable of standing up to vested interests and outside agendas, he generally favors private conversations over public confrontation. He has no apparent political ambitions.

In short, there's nothing flashy about him or his ideas. Instead, he's dogged, persistent, and—to use the term many use to describe his focus—"technical." He's that much-maligned thing: a traditional educator, a professional who communicates most, and best, with other educators. Substantively, Payzant's agenda seems quaint to those on both ends of the political spectrum who want immediate improvement.

"I've struggled my whole career to figure out the right balance," says Payzant. "I've been very top-down on some things, and as a result convinced some people that that's my style. Then when I've been more deliberative, I'm characterized as an incrementalist."

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In His Own Words *Tom Payzant looks back*

Q: What are you most proud of about your tenure in Boston?

TP (Tom Payzant): I think we've kept a laser-like focus on teaching and learning and closing the achievement gap.

Q: Has the state standards and accountability system (known as MCAS) helped or hindered your efforts?

TP: I'm a supporter of the MCAS. Compared with state assessments in other places, it is probably in the top half dozen or so with respect to rigor. The percentage of students passing has improved significantly, but now the goal is to accelerate the number of students reaching proficiency. Getting there has been very tough.

Q: How important have principal selection and assignment been to your success?

TP: I have appointed roughly 75–80 percent of the principals who are now leading our schools. The goal in Boston is to improve a whole system of schools. Developing knowledgeable and effective school leaders through grow-our-own programs has been a top priority. The quality of school leadership is second only to the quality of classroom instruction to improve student achievement.

Q: You're known for slow, careful implementation, starting with a handful of guinea pigs. Any downsides to that approach?

TP: We didn't have the resources to go with all schools at once in the literacy initiative, but still I wish that we had pushed it. I would have moved the math effort up by a year or two, even though there would have been some major pushback from the elementary schools about bringing in a new program in more than one subject at a time. It's worth noting that with math we went with a single math curriculum and didn't give choices as we had with literacy.

Q: Boston was one of the first districts to implement a broad coaching approach to professional development. Did it work as you'd hoped?

TP: The coaching model has changed a lot over the years, but I still believe it is critical to support teachers in the improvement of their instruction. In the beginning, coaches focused on school-wide professional development and some one-to-one work with classroom teachers. Now we have a collaborative coaching and learning model, where groups of teachers during common planning time focus on data, curriculum, and instructional strategies.

Q: Have the pilot schools lived up to their promise?

TP: The pilot schools have enabled us to compete with the charter schools approved by the state. They have most of the same autonomies granted to the charter schools, and they provide more school options, adding to the broad range of school choices for parents in the Boston Public Schools. The achievement results are strong, and the pilot schools are doing better than the charter schools at attracting special-education students and English-language learners to their already diverse student populations.

Q: You've got a reputation as a top-down technician and an incrementalist. Is that accurate? Or fair?

TP: I see my leadership style as somewhat eclectic. I try to get the balance right between the top-down and bottom-up approaches. This requires collaborative leadership, but sometimes those who are resisting change must be prodded and directed so that the interests of children will be served. I do believe that leaders have to focus on a few priorities, go deep, and get good results rather than play to many special interests. That approach can lead to fragmentation and poor results.

— Alexander Russo

To some extent, Payzant may simply be a victim of his own success. Having brought stability and demonstrated some positive change and stuck around long enough to have to clean up his own messes, he had to face the never-ending demand by all education stakeholders for him to do more—to do everything.

After 37 years in the business, Payzant leaves Boston a strong believer in staying focused, even if it means no more than steady progress and a BPS still in need of improvement. "The great thing about Boston is that there are so many institutions and organizations interested in education," he says. "The challenge is that this is a very complex city—much more so than some larger school districts. You've got to take advantage of the talent and the potential and interest but try and keep everyone focused on the teaching and learning agenda."

Alexander Russo is a Chicago-based education writer whose web site, This Week In Education (www.thisweekineducation.com), *covers school reform policy and media coverage of education issues.*

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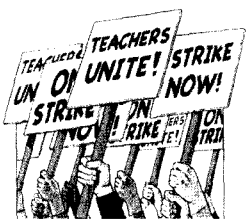
Strike PHOBIA

School boards need to drive a harder bargain



Four decades after collective bargaining came to public education, school boards and the superintendents they hire still routinely blame teacher unions for causing massive inefficiencies, stifling innovation, and preventing changes designed to promote student learning. "Our hands are tied," school boards commonly complain when school budgets are debated or far-reaching reforms are proposed. Unacknowledged is that every contract provision—from the lock-step salary schedules that reward longevity over excellence to the rigid work rules that dictate the rhythms of school life—was agreed to by those very same school boards.

BY FREDERICK M. HESS AND MARTIN R. WEST

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You don't have to be a conspiracy theorist to wonder whether collective bargaining in education hasn't become something more like collusion. In fact, the best evidence to support that position may be the steady decline in labor unrest. Despite some high-profile incidents—like the teacher "sick-out" which shut down 53 of Detroit's 235 schools last spring—strikes by teachers have become increasingly rare since 1975, a high-water mark, when there were 241 nationwide. By 2004 there were just 15. During this same period, the number of public school teachers rose from 2.2 million to more than 3.1 million, several times the rate of increase of the students they serve, whose numbers edged up only slightly, from 44.8 million to 48.4 million.

The current era of labor peace is typically attributed to laws in 31 states barring teachers from striking and mandating mediation or binding arbitration procedures. In addition, both sides have gained negotiating experience. However, that's not the whole story. Superintendents in cities like San Diego, Milwaukee, and Houston have reported being urged by civic officials, business leaders, and philanthropists to seek "consensus" and to "partner" with the local union.

Teachers agree that current policies on termination protect those who should not be in the schools. Seventy-eight percent of teachers nationwide report that there are at least a few in their school who are "simply going through the motions."

Has all this labor peace actually been good for education? Is it perhaps time for some discord?

The suggestion at first seems absurd. Parents and the voting public frown on labor conflict and teachers' strikes for good reason, not least among them the disruptions for family and schooling that are caused by even temporary school closings. Yet the public's aversion to conflict, combined with the political heft of teacher unions, can make school boards unduly deferential to union demands.

Despite the National Education Association's claims to be an advocate "for children and public education," we should not expect unions at the bargaining table to be *for* anything but their own interests. Naturally enough, those interests favor existing arrangements, which protect jobs; limit the demands placed on members, including their accountability for student performance; and safeguard the privileges of senior teachers. Teachers who entered the profession under these rules and patiently served their time, waiting for the rewards of seniority, are understandably resistant to measures that would significantly alter pay scales, job protections, or work rules.

As Robert Barkley, former executive director of the Ohio Education Association, explained, "The fundamental and legitimate purposes of unions [are] to protect the employment interests of their members. It is the primary function of management to represent the basic interests of the enterprise: teaching and learning."

These roles have been too often conflated.

What's Good for the Goose ... Is Good for the Goose

Collective bargaining agreements demonstrate the failure of school boards to fight for the interests of students and taxpayers, not to mention the prerogatives of sensible management. The contracts are long, complicated, and replete with both tediously detailed and needlessly ambiguous restrictions on administrators. The 199 collective bargaining agreements for teachers on file at the Bureau of Labor Statistics in January 2005 averaged 105 pages in length. And the topics covered in those pages extend far beyond bread-and-butter questions of salary and benefits; there are dozens of clauses covering a district's ability to evaluate, transfer, terminate, and manage the workload of teachers, all having potentially serious effects on the management of schools and student achievement.

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The Jefferson County, Kentucky, contract, for example, mandates that the district may not use student test scores "in any way to evaluate the work performance of employees unless they agree voluntarily." Restrictions on matters as important as evaluations of teachers can also be maddeningly ambiguous. The Little Rock, Arkansas, contract, for instance, specifies: "An individual teacher's lesson plan book shall be subject to the review of the principal at any time." But then it clarifies: "Teachers shall not be required to make their lesson plan books available on a scheduled basis."

Collective bargaining agreements also typically restrict the amount of time that teachers may be required to spend working with students, the number of students a teacher will instruct, and the number of lesson plans a teacher will prepare. In some cases they stipulate, as in Multnomah County, Oregon, that professional development "funds will be allocated based upon seniority of the unit members who make application," thus converting these expenditures from a lever for school improvement into a perk for long-serving faculty.

Similarly, when it becomes necessary to fill a classroom vacancy or to remove an ineffective teacher, district officials are often hobbled by contract language. A 2005 study by the New Teacher Project, the national nonprofit organization that works with school districts to recruit high-quality teachers, examined five urban districts and concluded that seniority-based transfer privileges written into contracts often force principals "to hire large numbers of teachers they do not want and who may not be a good fit for the job and their school." All but five states have laws giving teachers lifetime tenure after three years or less. While procedures for removing tenured teachers for "just cause" appear in most contracts, the available procedures are so burdensome that they are rarely used. A recent study of Illinois public schools found that, since 1986, an average of just two tenured teachers a year have been removed—in a state with more than 95,000 tenured teachers. The New Teacher Project report cited above found just four tenured teachers out of 70,000 fired for poor performance in the five districts studied.

Tellingly, teachers themselves agree that current policies on termination protect those who should not be in the schools. According to Public Agenda, 78 percent of teachers nationwide report that there are at least a few teachers in their school who "fail to do a good job and are simply going through the motions." The same Public Agenda study quoted one New Jersey union representative: "I've gone in and defended teachers who shouldn't even be pumping gas." A Los Angeles union representative bragged, "If I'm representing them, it's impossible to get them out. It's impossible. Unless they commit a lewd act." While such admissions may be startling, they highlight an important aspect of the union's role: having been granted the exclusive right to represent teachers in the district, the union is legally bound to advocate for all of them. This obligation limits the capacity of unions to serve as partners in reform.

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Passive Implementation

Once negotiated, collective bargaining agreements do not implement themselves. And the manner in which superintendents, school boards, and district personnel interpret and apply the often ambiguous contract language has significantly aggravated the problem. As one former school-board member from a large urban district noted, "Too often school boards and superintendents complain that they cannot do something because of the teachers union contract. Often what they complained was restricted wasn't actually prohibited ... but might cause some political difficulties or raise some public issues." Boards and their appointed administrators seemingly find it easier to sink into this "zone of ambiguity" than to take stands that may provoke visible unrest, negative publicity, or a work stoppage.

Some of management's reticence is understandable. When a union believes that management actions violate contract terms, it typically files an appeal or a grievance in accordance with procedures spelled out in the contract. Critics of teacher unions assert that resources and specialized expertise give the union a pronounced advantage in the ensuing proceedings. A striking example of union capacity is the National Education Association's UniServ system, a nationwide network of 1,650 full-time and 200 part-time NEA employees who provide guidance to local affiliates on matters such as negotiations and grievance resolution. The NEA itself touts the UniServ program as "a vast cadre of human resources," on which it spent some $50 million in 2001, but it also attempts to downplay the system's impact, saying that each employee has multiple responsibilities and works with multiple districts. What UniServ offers, union proponents claim, pales beside the legal, staff, and budgetary resources available to school boards.

In truth, unions seem to navigate the grievance process more adroitly than district officials, but that is only partly due to resources. It is also because they aggressively exploit contract language, while school boards and superintendents are often more interested in avoiding confrontation than in asserting managerial prerogatives.

More Pay and Benefits, Less Quality

If we assume that better salaries attract better candidates, it would initially seem that compensation is an area where collective bargaining advances the interests of students as well as teachers. However, while unions have fought to increase salaries and to improve benefit packages, they have resisted

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efforts to ensure that this spending recruits, rewards, and retains the most essential or effective teachers.

Virtually all teachers' collective bargaining agreements establish salary schedules based strictly on years of experience and accumulated graduate credits. These "step-and-lane" schedules, which legislatures and school boards have accepted, reflect union preferences for wage agreements that increase member solidarity and benefit the most union members. Unfortunately, there is good reason to believe that they have contributed to the well-documented decline in the aptitude of new teachers and to shortages in high-need subject areas. At a minimum, the rigidity of existing salary schedules restricts superintendents' options for remedying these problems.

Nearly all contracts also still call for defined-benefit retirement plans, which provide a traditional pension and disproportionately reward educators who stay in place for 20 years. As Matthew Lathrop of the American Legislative Exchange Council has noted, "The guaranteed benefit is only good for those who spend a substantial part of their career with one employer. That's an enormous drawback in today's economy, when even public employees are less likely to stick with a single employer."

Evidence similarly suggests that teachers' benefit packages are poorly equipped to deal with the rising costs of health care. A 2005 study by the Rhode Island Education Partnership, for example, found that public school districts in that state uniformly allowed employees to select their own health carrier and plan design and that 73 percent of districts offered no-cost health benefits for retirees; not one of the private-sector firms in the state the study examined offered these perks. In short, much like troubled industrial-era firms General Motors (GM) and United Airlines, many school districts are sinking enormous sums into benefit plans that are poorly designed to attract new talent and may ultimately prove unaffordable.

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Unions and Education Politics

One reason school boards are hesitant to take a stronger stance in negotiations and in contract implementation may be the firm hand that unions exercise in education politics. Quite simply, school-board elections offer teacher unions the unusual opportunity to influence the makeup of the management team they will face at the bargaining table. (See Terry Moe, "The Union Label on the Ballot Box," page 58.) It is as if the board of directors of General Motors were not selected by its shareholders, but by the residents of Detroit. The result of such a scenario would be a management team focused on workers' concerns more than on holding down costs or chasing efficiencies.

Actually, it is worse than that, as GM is ultimately subject to the discipline of the marketplace. If the company allowed efficiency to decline too far, it would be driven into bankruptcy by competitors, domestic or foreign. In public education, however, such market pressures are muted by the lack of market competition and organizational inertia. A union official in Cleveland offered a telling insight when discussing a negotiator who was demanding concessions after a state takeover. The union official recalled: "We looked at [the negotiator] and said, 'Why do we have to do that?' His background was in the private sector, where he can threaten, 'If you don't do this, we're moving the factory to Mexico.' Well, we knew the school system wasn't moving to Mexico, so we just said, 'No, we're not doing that.'"

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And since school-board elections are typically low-turnout affairs, organized and energized interests, like teacher unions, can exert even more influence on the outcome than their raw numbers would suggest. Almost 60 percent of board members nationwide say the teacher unions are "very active" or "somewhat active" in their local elections, according to research published by the National School Boards Association. By comparison, fewer than one-third of the board members reported that business groups were "very" or "somewhat" active in elections in their districts.

Unions are also active in state and federal legislatures, using their lobbying clout to safeguard their collective bargaining muscle and to ensure that negotiations unfold on a hospitable playing field. Union dues provide resources to pursue ever more favorable laws. And the dues are augmented by dollars deducted from the paychecks of nonmembers as a result of state laws that allow unions to collect funds from all teachers covered by the contract. Ironically, even the No Child Left Behind Act offers a telling example of union influence as the first federal law to recognize explicitly, and ultimately defer to, collective bargaining's role in education governance. In theory, the law empowers districts to replace staff members at persistently low-performing schools. This provision was promptly eviscerated at the behest of the unions: the Department of Education sheepishly allowed that the authority can be exercised only if the district's contract allows it.

A telling example of union influence is provided by the No Child Left Behind Act, the first federal education law to recognize explicitly, and ultimately defer to, collective bargaining's role in education governance.

The False Promise of "New Unionism"

The case for reforming the collective bargaining process has become so strong that even some union supporters have sought to persuade union locals to abandon an industrial model of contract negotiations for a more collaborative "new unionism." Thoughtful, well-intentioned advocates such as Charles Kerchner and Adam Urbanski call for unions and districts to work together to foster professionalism, create pleasant working conditions, and involve teachers in governance and decisionmaking (see "Reform or Be Reformed," *forum*, Fall 2001). The "new unionists" point to the 1996 formation of the Teacher Union Reform Network and to widely touted collective bargaining agreements in Dade County, Florida; in Seattle; and in Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio.

Many union sympathizers contend that new unionism has already changed the character of the nation's major teacher unions. Wayne Urban, professor of education and an expert on teacher unions, notes that NEA president Robert Chase gave a pivotal address on behalf of new unionism at the National Press Club in 1997, calling for "the transformation of his organization away from the adversarial stance institutionalized in collective bargaining toward one that was more professional." He says for the next half decade, Chase "tirelessly advocated his new union agenda." Likewise, a handbook written in 2006 by Linda Kaboolian, a respected academic proponent of reform unionism (see also Kaboolians' essay "Table Talk," *forum*, page 14), asserts that "a great deal of collaborative innovation exists and has been ongoing for many years." In short, serious voices believe that the teacher unions have *already* committed themselves to new unionism.

In reality, sustained attempts to instill new unionism have occurred in just a handful of districts, and the results have been fairly disappointing. This bleak track record should be no surprise. Union leaders are elected by current members to protect their interests, and most teachers remain highly satisfied with their unions' conduct of collective bargaining. A national poll of teachers conducted by Terry Moe in

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Collaborative Union Leaders Get Lauded—and Unseated

Union leaders are rarely voted out of office, and when they are, the reasons aren't always clear. There is anecdotal evidence, though, that those union officials who seek to professionalize teaching, or partner with districts in reform efforts, are risking a challenge from hard-liners in the ranks.

Six years ago, for instance, Cincinnati Federation of Teachers President Rick Beck agreed to a modest merit-pay experiment, only to be ousted the following April by a challenger who opposed the plan. The new policy would have eventually based teachers' salaries in part on evaluations by the principal and a number of outside evaluators hired by the district. It had won the support of even the most die-hard opponents of market-based reforms. *New York Times* columnist Richard Rothstein wrote, "A radical experiment in teacher pay here could become a national model if successful." He concluded, "Cincinnati's experiment is the one to watch." But in the next leadership election campaign, Susan Taylor accused Beck of failing to protect teachers and argued that the experiment should be curtailed. Taylor claimed the presidency in a landslide, winning 78 percent of the vote.

Similar circumstances led to the ouster of the union chief in Hartford, Connecticut. After they were taken over by the state in 1997, the Hartford Public Schools won widespread acclaim as an example of effective management and labor collaboration. The Hartford Federation of Teachers even served in 2001 as host of a national American Federation of Teachers (AFT) conference on collaborating with school management to improve failing schools. It turned out, though, that a lot of Hartford teachers weren't happy with their union's playing the role of partner. As one teacher, Joe Troiano, asked in a *Hartford Courant* article, "Does it really cost almost $700 a year [in dues] to say 'yes, yes' to administration?" In 2002, incumbent union president Edwin Vargas was defeated by challenger Tim Murphy. Murphy had previously served as Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT) president from 1978 to 1986, a conflict-ridden period marked by troubled school performance. Murphy reclaimed the presidency by promising to advocate more for the interests of teachers. "I will not allow what happened to Ed Vargas to happen to me," Murphy told the *Courant*.

A palace coup felled United Educators of San Francisco President Kent Mitchell and his cabinet in 2003, when the union's secretary, Dennis Kelly, and his colleagues took over the office, winning 60 percent of the vote. Union insiders said that Mitchell lost because he had become too close to district administrators.

Mitchell admitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "It would seem that the membership has decided that they would prefer a more confrontational approach."

Ironically, Mitchell had claimed the presidency as a challenger himself; in 1997, he had defeated Joan Shelley, who had been president for more than a decade until—as a *San Francisco Chronicle* May 1997 article put it—she was thought to have "grown too cozy with the district's management."

— Frederick Hess and Martin West

2003 revealed that 84 percent of union members report that they are either somewhat or very satisfied with the job their unions do in representing their interests in collective bargaining. Predictably, incumbent union leaders who have embraced a strategy of collaboration or have simply been regarded as too cooperative have been voted out of office by teachers seeking more combative leadership. (See sidebar.)

Unions in any industry are loath to contemplate givebacks. Even when firms have declared bankruptcy or are on the verge of doing so, as in the airline and auto parts industries in recent years, union leaders frequently resist concessions on wages, benefits, or work conditions. Historically, unions have agreed to concessions only when the leadership calculates that the costs of holding firm outweigh the losses they'll be giving up at the table—and when they can convince their members that is the case. Sometimes, as when the United Steel Workers chose to watch the American steel industry sink rather than accept concessions, this moment never comes—or comes far too late. In such cases, the only option is to watch the *Titanic* slowly go under and then repair to a shipyard with new blueprints. That option is not available in public education, at least not without disruption on a scale that would dwarf the fallout of even the most bitter teachers' strike.

Getting Serious

Those looking to reinvent American schooling for a new century must recognize that unions are holding fast to

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The only systematic study of how newspapers cover collective bargaining revealed that in 12 out of 20 large school districts, the local daily newspaper printed no more than one article on contract negotiations.

contracts designed to address the challenges and inequities of an earlier era. Union leaders often invoke norms of justice when seeking to ensure that veteran teachers continue to enjoy the same perks and protections they were implicitly promised when they entered the profession a quarter century ago—despite intervening changes in the larger world, in the needs of students, and in management and organizational practice. One can sympathize with union locals and simultaneously see the contracts they've negotiated as enormous obstacles to retooling schools for the 21st century.

The answer, then, is not in fond hopes that union leaders will be sweet-talked or shamed into embracing change. With rare exceptions, their position simply won't permit it. At the same time, eliminating collective bargaining is not a useful goal. Not only is it politically hopeless, but evidence from other industries suggests that unions can be a constructive force given the proper conditions.

Established practices in negotiating teachers' compensation and the rules governing hiring, termination, and work routines need to come of age. The challenge is not in deciding what changes are needed, as there is already broad agreement on many of the desirable modifications. The challenge is making them happen. Changing collective bargaining means changing the environment in which it is conducted. A crucial first step, already under way, is establishing meaningful competition and accountability for schools—creating pressure on management and giving union leaders the cover to say to their members, "We need to deal, because if the schools don't improve, all the alternatives are going to be uglier still." But we also need more transparency, accompanied by a big change of heart.

Promoting Transparency The habits of district-union collusion are due in large part to the public's ignorance of what collective bargaining agreements say and to a strong desire for tranquility and smooth school operations. Experience suggests that when parents, policymakers, or civic leaders are made aware of the costs, rules, and protections the agreements impose, they are much less willing to accept the status quo and more willing to back hard-nosed district leadership.

The failure of the general public and more than a few policymakers to understand the stakes is largely due to the scant attention the media give these dealings. A 2005 study of how newspapers cover collective bargaining revealed that in 12 out of 20 large school districts, the local daily newspaper printed no more than one article on the contract negotiations. A national union official explained, "Bargaining is conducted behind closed doors. Neither side 'goes public,' even to its own members, until the entire contract is done." While productive negotiations require the confidence to float ideas without fear that they will appear in tomorrow's headlines, greater transparency would force both the union and management to justify their demands in the face of public scrutiny.

Local officials could take a page from the playbook of former New York City councilwoman Eva Moskowitz (see *forum*, page 24) and hold hearings on the local contract, inviting public scrutiny and media coverage. The Moskowitz inquiry was especially valuable in providing reporters a context for writing about the contract's implementation and its impact on district operations. Officials and civic leaders should also ensure that influential members of the local media are aware of the contract's provisions and have information on the nature, conduct, and outcomes of grievance and arbitration proceedings. While beat reporters and education editors may not be in a position to redirect coverage or to invite controversy on their own authority, publishers and editorial writers are able and willing to do so when convinced the matter is a pressing issue of broad public concern.

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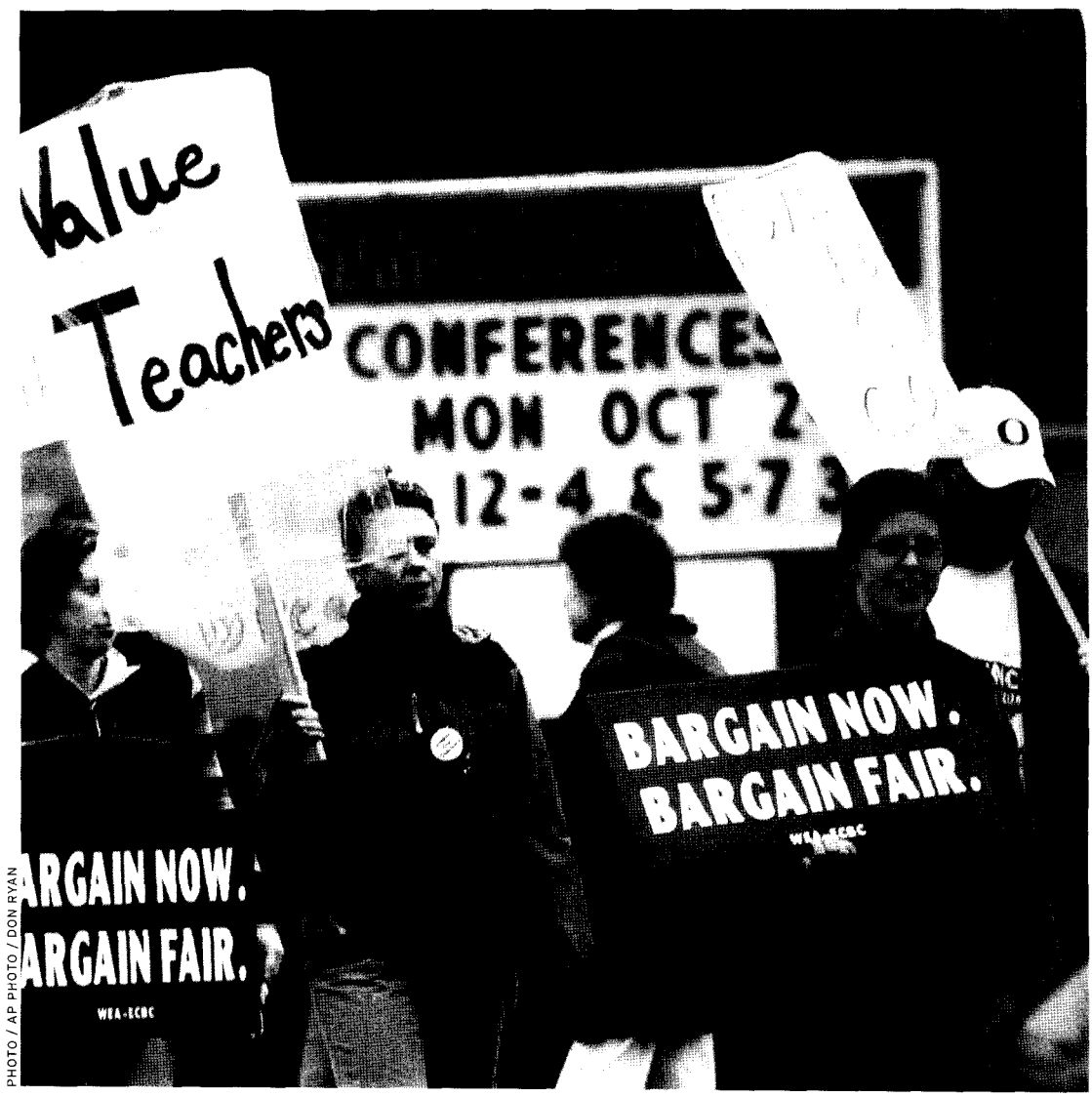
Acting Decisively Most managers prefer to avoid conflict. However, when nimble competitors, irate stockholders, and the need for self-preservation demand it, executives in the private sector take a deep breath and accept the inevitability of painful fights over staffing, operations, and work rules. Only a similar firmness of purpose will enable school boards and superintendents to do what must be done. In particular, they need to:

Negotiate hard. If you haven't missed an airplane recently, management consultants tell us, you're spending too much time in airports. Considering the contracts that school boards have come to accept, one might similarly conclude that boards that don't provoke a work action once in a while aren't pushing hard enough at the table. In the short run, schools may need more, fiercer, and uglier contract disputes. That would show that school boards and superintendents are fighting hard for the children, the community, and the taxpayers. Superintendents and board members are not independent agents, however. They can't do it alone.

Rally the public. Newspaper editorial boards, civic leaders, local chambers of commerce, and parent groups have made it eminently clear that they want everyone to find a way to "get along," and they expect district leaders to find a way to avoid upsetting the apple cart. These stakeholder groups need to rethink their belief that labor unrest is uniformly a sign of leadership failure. Labor unrest can be a good thing when the alternative is to continue to accept an anachronistic, stifling, and perversely constructed status quo. Taking back prerogatives and language that unions have won in previous rounds of negotiations will inevitably be a bruising, unpleasant struggle—one that only the staunchest district officials will undertake, and one that they will win only if the community is committed to seeing it through. As long as they cannot count on community support in the face of labor unrest, sensible board members and superintendents will continue to fold on the important questions.

Make arbitration work for students. Some states, like New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, have well-defined mediation or arbitration procedures that kick in when the parties can't reach agreement. These policies can effectively take the bat out of a school board's hand, sometimes imposing mandatory settlement terms on even those boards willing to drive a hard bargain. There is surprisingly little systematic research on the outcomes of the arbitration process. However, arbitrators and mediators, who must be approved by both sides, tend to be risk-averse



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consensus seekers who frown on calls for radical changes to existing provisions. This tendency is undoubtedly aggravated in some cases by "past-practice" contract clauses, which treat established routines as controlling. The availability of arbitration therefore highlights two additional considerations for would-be reformers: the need to scrutinize state laws governing a contract impasse to ensure that they do not stack the deck in favor of union interests and the importance of raising public awareness of contract provisions that arbitrators might otherwise leave untouched.

Implement smart. It's not enough to stand firm at the table. District officials must also aggressively exploit existing language or interpret ambiguous language in whatever way provides the most flexibility to respond to student needs. With their hands stayed by the desire to maintain a cordial working environment, a fear of negative publicity, and concern about costly and time-consuming grievance proceedings, administrators frequently treat the absence of clear managerial prerogatives in contracts as an excuse for inaction. This suggests that district leaders need a new mindset about implementation. It also shows how important it is to thrash out at the bargaining table language that minimizes the "zone of ambiguity" regarding managerial rights on issues like compensation, termination, teacher transfer, and work rules. Ultimately, however, district leaders must ensure that their staff members know how to take advantage of management rights, and school boards must charge the superintendent and senior staff with actually making full use of managerial prerogatives.

Increasing Capacity Finally, we must recognize that school boards are relatively weak governing bodies, composed of part-timers with other obligations, limited expertise, and little incentive to engage in contentious negotiations. A 2001 National School Boards Association survey found that most school-board members are unpaid, devote fewer than ten hours a week to board-related business, and have served on the board for five years or less. It is asking a lot to expect these part-timers, even with the aid of experienced attorneys, to go toe-to-toe with seasoned union leaders in the kind of public controversy engendered by a contract standoff. Board positions need to be made more attractive and augmented with research and staff support, or districts need to move toward alternative forms of governance in which the costs of inefficiency and lagging achievement become intolerable.

School boards are relatively weak governing bodies, composed of part-timers with other obligations, limited expertise, and little incentive to engage in contentious negotiations.

Above all, school-board members and those who elect them must never lose sight of the fact that collective bargaining is an adversarial process. Ironically, the current crop of teacher union leaders seem less like such labor lions as Samuel Gompers and Walter Reuther and more like Charlie Wilson, the imperial president of General Motors. "What's good for GM is good for the country," Wilson blithely remarked in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee a half century ago. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have long argued that what is good for America's teachers is good for America's children—and, by implication, for America itself. The willingness of too many superintendents, school boards, and legislators to act as if this were true has been a crippling handicap for America's schools. It is time to move beyond utopian dreams, or overwrought efforts to goad unions into good behavior, and to recognize that labor strife may be the birth pains of real school reform.

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Keeping Out *the* Christians

Evangelical high schools meet public universities

Jordan Trivison is a very active participant in Shannon Jonker's 12th-grade English class. On one recent morning Jordan recapped in detail several chapters of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which the students had been assigned to read the previous night. When the other seniors at Calvary Chapel high school in Murietta, California, joined in the discussion, the class moved quickly from the question of whether the monster in the novel can be blamed for his behavior—since he was abandoned shortly after his formation, and no one taught him right from wrong—to the more complex issue of "whether the monster has a soul." Jordan struggled with this issue, noting that, on the one hand, the monster was created by man, and not God, but, on the other hand, he was capable of love and compassion.

The discussion, encompassing as it did such explicitly religious ideas, might not have taken place in a typical high-school classroom, but Jordan is for all intents and purposes a typical high-school student. He has California blond hair, sports a well-worn Eagles T-shirt, is active in student government and his church, and says that he rarely gets to bed before midnight because of homework. Looking to the future, he hopes to attend the nearby University of California at Riverside (to be close to his family and save money), where he plans to major in business and political science. Eventually, he wants to become a stockbroker and then run for Congress. As much as Jordan likes the evangelical atmosphere at Calvary, he doesn't think a Christian college campus would challenge him in the same way as UC, for example. "I want to be in a setting where I can stand up for what I believe in and not back down," he says. "If I want to be a politician someday, I'll have to start somewhere."

Jordan is already getting a sense of just how hard he will have to fight to reach his goals. His high school is now engaged in a battle over whether students who attend Christian high schools will be given the same opportunity as their public school counterparts to attend California's state universities.

ILLUSTRATION / JERRY HOARE

BY NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

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Controversy over the science requirements turned a lawsuit by the Association for Christian Schools International into another story about evolution and intelligent design.... In fact, it was about much more.

A year and a half ago, Calvary approached the University of California's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools with the curricula of some new courses it wanted to offer. The board must ensure that the classes given in California's high schools are sufficiently rigorous to be counted in UC admissions decisions. Calvary submitted three courses for approval in the areas of history/social science and English/literature. It also made inquiries about curricula it wanted to offer in the natural sciences and religion/ethics, in an effort to clarify the board's policies. In the end, the three courses were officially rejected, and the remainder would have been if they had been submitted.

The decision was a slap in the face to Calvary, which prided itself on educating kids in religious and secular knowledge, but the school didn't turn the other cheek. It sued. And because the University of California action was perceived by many religious educators as a possible precedent for action elsewhere, Calvary was joined in its suit by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), an umbrella group for four thousand Christian education institutions.

Rejection on Grounds of Religion

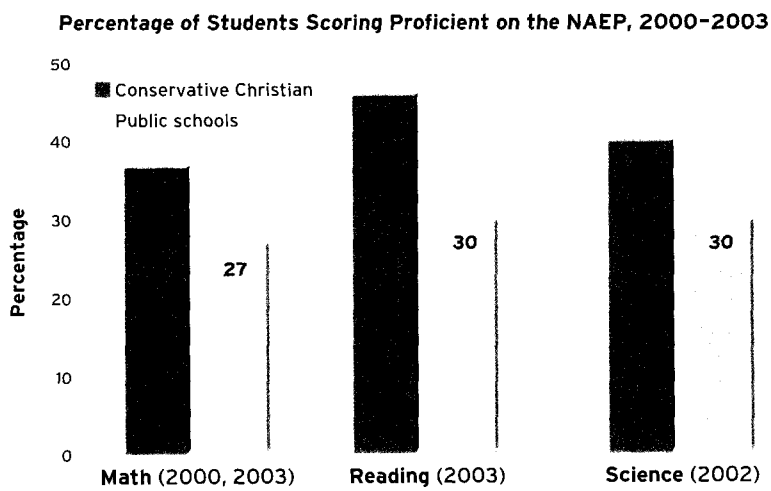
The science classes from Calvary were rejected by the UC with a simple form letter, one apparently sent to all schools that proposed to use Christian high-school science textbooks published by the two biggest Christian publishers, A Beka Book and Bob Jones University. "The content of the course outlines submitted for approval is not consistent with the viewpoints and knowledge generally accepted in the scientific community," said the letter. "As such, students who take these courses may not be well prepared for success if/when they enter science courses/programs at UC." UC's general counsel, Chris Patti, notes that these texts have many "scientific errors," and the "biggest one is [the way they describe] evolution."

Evolution, intelligent design, and creationism are all presented in the Christian biology books. But even if the last two were left out, UC still wouldn't be satisfied. According to Burt Carney, ACSI's legal-affairs director, in a meeting held after the rejection of the textbooks, Barbara Sawrey, a professor of chemistry at UC San Diego, explained that there was nothing wrong scientifically with the proposed physics textbook. She simply objected to its including a verse from scripture at the beginning of each chapter.

While controversy over the science requirements turned this lawsuit into another story about evolution and intelligent design for many in the media, the case is, in fact, about much more. The college also objected to one of Calvary's history courses, "Christianity's Influence on America," because, as the UC letter said, the focus was "too narrow/too specialized" and because it is "not consistent with the empirical historical knowledge generally accepted in the collegiate community." The curriculum of the course seems broad enough—covering the

Answering the Call (Figure 1)

Students at Christian schools score significantly higher than do their public-school counterparts on the math, reading, and science sections of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics. Marianne Perie, Alan Vanneman, and Arnold Goldstein, "Student Achievement in Private Schools: Results from NAEP 2000–2005"

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role of Christianity in the founding, the abolitionist movement, civil rights, the fall of communism—but it seems downright all-encompassing when compared, as it was in the complaint, with approved classes like "Modern Irish History" and "Armenian History."

Calvary's literature class, "Christian Morality in American Literature," was rejected because it "does not offer a non-biased approach to the subject matter." But, as Calvary and ACSI pointed out, the UC approved courses such as "Feminine Perspectives in Literature" and "Ethnic Experiences in Literature." UC counsel Patti would later try to clarify the rejection by saying that the Calvary course relied solely on works from an anthology. Never mind that the anthology included works by Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Walt Whitman.

Ultimately, Patti argues that it is irrelevant whether the UC rejects such courses since other entry methods are available to the Calvary students. UC, he explains, will admit students who score at a certain level on standardized tests, and they may also be admitted by "exception." Calvary students would thus have to perform in the top 4 percent on exams like the SATII (being in the top 15 percent usually gets you into one of the university campuses). Admission by "exception" is used mostly for home schoolers. The UC system has more than 200,000 students. "Exception" was made for only eight students in the entire system last year.

PHOTO / COURTESY CALVARY CHAPEL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Calvary Chapel Christian School resembles an academically average high school with a little more order and discipline.

What's Wrong with God?

Why place this burden on Christian-school students? A UC statement explains that the school's requirements are there to ensure "that students coming to the University are conversant with accepted educational and scientific content and methods of inquiry at the level required for UC students and typically expected of educated citizens in the competitive workforce." But Patti acknowledges that there is no evidence that students admitted from schools using these textbooks or offering these courses are performing any differently from their peers in secular high schools. Indeed, juniors at ACSI schools performed between 8 and 27 percentage points above average on the Stanford 10 subject tests in the 2004–05 school year (see Figure 1).

Though UC's rules aren't affecting a great number of students right now, because they apply only if a school submits proposals for new curricula, ACSI's Burt Carney believes it is only a matter of time before the university goes after the 150 or so schools in California that already offer these classes. "Right now, ACSI has distinctively religious schools, which have endeavored to integrate faith and learning in all the subjects," Carney explains. "If California prevails, the only way for students to go from our schools to university would be to strip out the religious elements of their education."

Indeed, a list of "helpful hints" from the university suggests stripping religion even out of the religion classes: "Religion and ethics courses are acceptable … as long as they … do not include among its [sic] primary goals the personal religious growth of the student." This idea would probably sound odd to parents who send their children to any religious school—whether Catholic, Jewish, or evangelical—since character building is one of the foundations of the education excellence these institutions pride themselves on.

Of course, religious schools have always included personal growth among their goals. But just at the time when public universities seem to be taking more precautions against such knowledge (read: moral judgments) creeping into their

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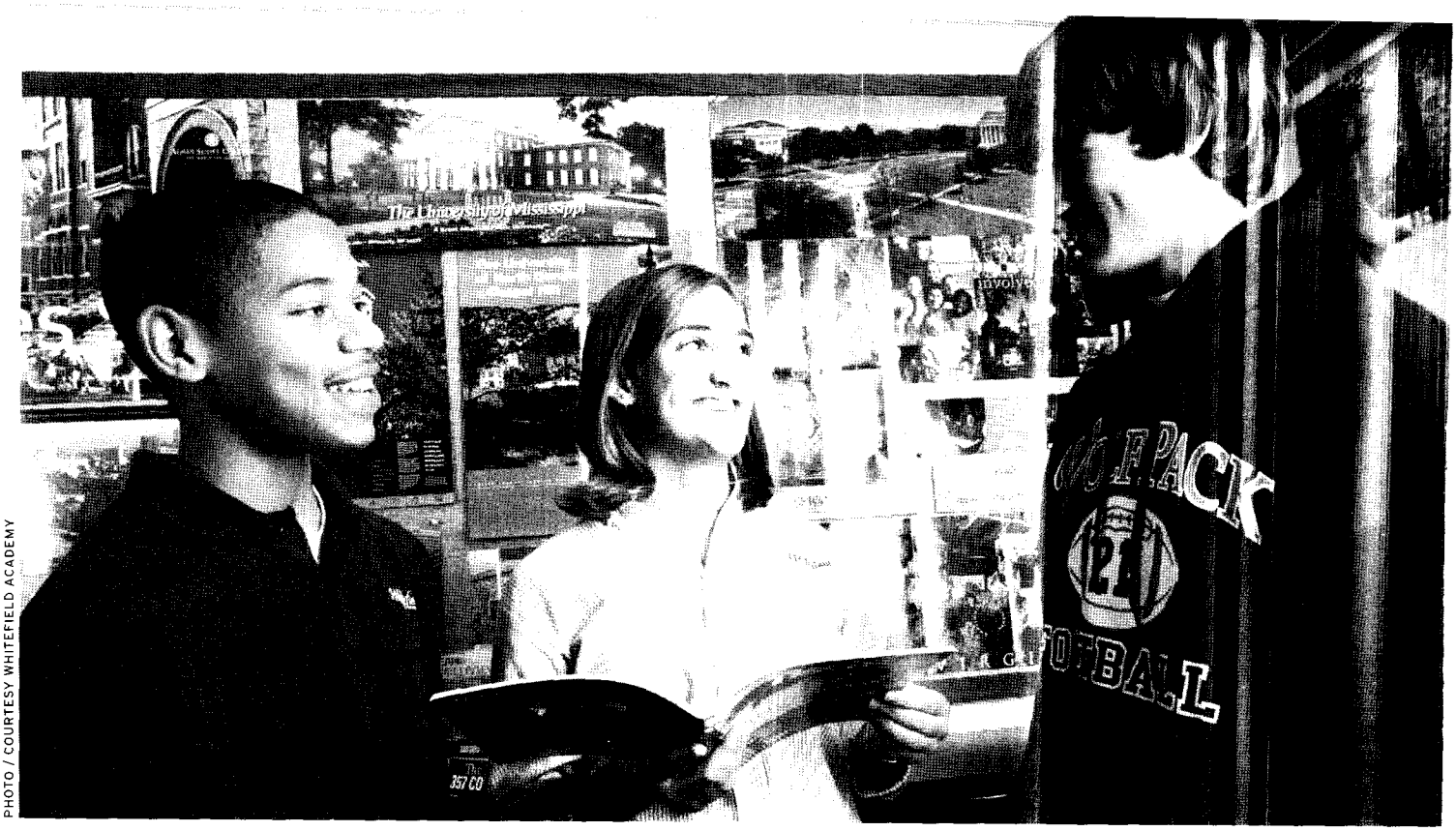

PHOTO / COURTESY WHITEFIELD ACADEMY

At Whitefield Academy, the faculty is determined to bring faith into every aspect of the curriculum. At the same time, it wants its students to succeed in the secular world.

curricula, evangelical high schools are being more aggressive in practicing what Carney refers to as the "integration of faith and learning."

For instance, at Whitefield Academy, an evangelical school just outside Atlanta, the faculty is determined to bring faith into every aspect of the curriculum. Stacy Quiros, Whitefield's band director and one of the school's founders, explains, "Even though we may be doing algebra, we can say that the wonder of math and the beauty of numbers come from this creative God we serve. Even though we're studying notes and rhythms, the end result is a sacrifice to God, a sweet aroma."

But Quiros, who is also the parent of three current Whitefield students and one graduate, says she and the other parents who helped get the school off the ground, in 1996, did not want to sacrifice academic quality in order to have a true Christian school. "We believe that all truth is God's truth. We were not willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Until recently Quiros's statements would have been considered heretical in many evangelical communities, where the faithful tended to subscribe to a creed that Christian historian Mark Noll in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, says meant "that we, and only we, have the truth, while nonbelievers or Christian believers who are not evangelicals practice only error." This led evangelicals to dismiss most secular ideas, explains Noll, a professor at the evangelical Wheaton College, and to fail "notably in sustaining serious intellectual life."

The notion that faith and learning can coexist has spread to many evangelical colleges in the past few decades and could explain the growing popularity of Christian schooling (see Figure 2). Scholarly pursuits are now seen as a way of glorifying God, both in studying the greatness of God's world and in developing one's God-given faculties (an approach to religious education long practiced by Catholic educators). And now these ideas have trickled down to high schools, in part because many Christian-college graduates are choosing to teach at the secondary-school level. Current Christian high school students seem well-versed in the idea of using faith as an inspiration to pursue secular knowledge. Says Jordan Trivison: "Students here bring religion to their attitude toward academics." As a poster in one of Calvary's science classrooms puts it, "You need to do all things for the glory of God."

A Cross-Section of Christian Schools

That students work hard is all well and good, but the question of how rigorous this kind of education really is will likely be raised many more times in the coming years. Burt Carney is worried not only that other public colleges might follow the University of California's lead, but also that groups like the Educational Testing Service are considering classroom visits to make sure that teachers and curricula in AP courses, for instance, meet certain standards. If those standards turn out to be as hostile to religious content as those of UC, then ACSI schools have reason to worry.

What visitors to Christian high school classrooms would find, however, might surprise them. Though evangelical schools remain resolute in their adherence to Christian doctrine, they are also maintaining their academic rigor. I visited three fairly typical schools, Calvary, Whitefield, and Colorado Springs Christian School, and it was clear that much more was being taught than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Calvary Chapel, with a few stars like Jordan, resembles an academically average public high school. There is probably a

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little more order and discipline at Calvary than in a typical public school, but Calvary's students work hard, and they learn math, history, and science from competent teachers. Most of Calvary's college-bound graduates (about half the senior class) go to public colleges, and for most of those, UC Riverside is about as good as they get.

Whitefield, on the other hand, looks very much like a New England prep school. Both the campus and its 1,200 kids are clean-cut; uniforms are required. Though no one at the school was willing to say that Whitefield youth are perfect, there seemed to be a general agreement that, as biology teacher Christopher McDonald puts it, "You would find a much lower incidence of drug use and sexual promiscuity here" than at other local private and public schools.

McDonald is quick to say that that is not simply the result of Whitefield's Christian bent or even because its students must sign on to a fierce honor and disciplinary code. Rather, he says, "This school is an extension of the family. They're in this environment during the day and then they go home to strong Christian families at night, and on the weekends, they're attending church." This is not just speculation. Whitefield considers itself a "covenant school," meaning that, according to the school's policy manual, "at least one parent or guardian (and preferably both parents or both guardians) professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior." Indeed, at many ACSI schools it is not only the parent but also the student who must provide such Christian "testimony" in the application process. Without it, school administrators believe, the religious identity of the institution will be watered-down over time.

Whitefield has watched as many of the older Christian high schools in the area have become increasingly secular—largely indistinguishable from other private high schools. Whitefield wants to avoid such a fate. At the same time, though, it wants its students to be able to succeed in the secular world. And that is why it is so important to Whitefield parents and administrators for the school to gain a good academic reputation as well.

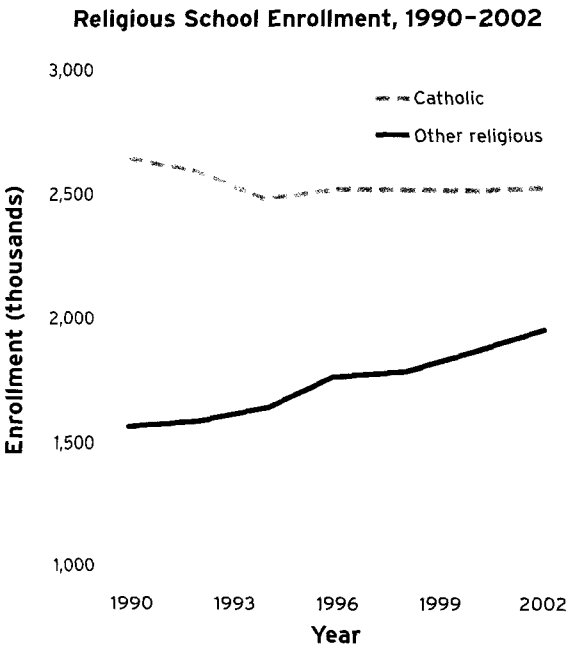
It seems to have succeeded on the academic front. An English teacher speaking about Huck Finn to a class of seniors compares Tom's character to the Devil's in *Paradise Lost*, a reference that the kids understand because they had read Milton the previous year. European history students are studying Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, because, as teacher Amy Seefeldt explains, even though Frankl is an atheist, "He says that at the core of human existence is the search for meaning." In all of her history classes, Seefeldt tries to show students how this is "what every civilization has been searching for." Students are doing well on AP and SAT tests and being accepted at top colleges, including Boston College, Baylor, Pepperdine, Duke, Washington and Lee, and Dartmouth.

Whitefield's headmaster, Tim Hillen, acknowledges the difficulty in getting people to take a relatively new and strongly Christian school seriously. But, he says, "The proof is in the pudding. We have the actual statistics, and the education achievement is here."

Colorado Springs Christian School (CSCS) falls somewhere between Whitefield and Calvary in the ranks of ACSI schools. It is bigger than both (with 1,700 students) and was founded in 1971, before either one. The school has a dress code, which prohibits such religious fashion no-nos as "excessive sagging" on men's pants, but it is easy to spot boxer shorts, bra straps, and all sorts of other signs of immodesty among students strolling the campus. Though the vast majority of the students do go on to college, they generally go to less-impressive schools than students who matriculate from Whitefield. Many students plan to attend public institutions nearby, such as the University of Colorado. The environment is not heavily intellectual; the principal used to be an athletics coach. His office doesn't have many books, but it does have a religious sculpture of two hands, palms facing heavenward, filled with manna for adolescents: miniature candy bars.

The Good News for Evangelicals (Figure 2)

The number of students enrolled in non-Catholic, mostly Evangelical Protestant, schools increased by more than 350,000 between 1990 and 2002. Catholic school enrollments declined by about 120,000 over the same period.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, "Private School Universe Survey"

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PHOTO / COURTESY COLORADO SPRINGS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Part of what makes Colorado Springs Christian School distinctive is a faculty whose members care deeply about their charges.

Part of what makes CSCS distinctive is a faculty whose members care deeply about their own faith and that of their charges. As history teacher Kris Walker notes, teachers are "definitely not in it for the money." Students frequently mention how much the teachers at CSCS care about them (and how much they sacrifice to work there). Walker explains the decision she and her colleagues have made to teach at CSCS: "This is where God wants us. We're here to make eternal differences in their lives, not just get them into college."

Where to Draw the Line

Other factors bring teachers to CSCS as well. Maryanne Brilleslyper, who has a Ph.D. in choral conducting and has just taken over as the school's choir director, has taken a pay cut to come here from a public school. She is confident in her decision because, she says, "There's nothing I can't sing here. I don't need school board approval to mention God. I can base my choices on musical merit." The opportunity to share their religious beliefs in intellectual and emotional contexts is exciting to many of the teachers at Calvary, Whitefield, and Colorado Springs Christian. Their curricula are not censored, at least not for mention of God, and their interactions with students can include helping them through spiritual crises, not just academic ones.

Parents like this aspect of Christian schools, too. Randy LaPierre, who has two sons at Calvary Chapel, says that families are able to have "a certain bond with teachers," which would allow him to go meet a new teacher, "and after a minute or two, say, 'Hey, can I pray with you?' And I can feel his heart will be lined up with my heart."

In sum, these schools provide students, teachers, and families with a common cause, academically and religiously. One of Whitefield's more surprising attributes is the school's racial integration. With minorities composing 20 percent of the enrollment, the school could easily experience the kind of self-segregation that plagues many education institutions. Not only does the Whitefield student body seem cohesive, but the black students are achieving at high levels. An AP biology class of 12, for instance, has 5 black students.

A school's willingness to define its boundaries, however exclusionary they may seem to outsiders, can have clear benefits for education. Perhaps the most interesting illustration of this idea comes from a story Stacy Quiros tells about a Buddhist woman who wanted to send her kids to Whitefield.

"I started talking to her about her faith," says Quiros. "I said, 'You're going to have a hard time reconciling the fact that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior and there is only one way to salvation with your own beliefs.'" When the woman told Quiros that her son could "learn that stuff too," Quiros asked, "What are you going to do when your son comes home and says, 'This is what I'm being taught?' Isn't that going to be a conflict?" The mother shrugged, "Well that's *just* school." With little fanfare, Quiros replied, "No it's not."

Perhaps there's a lesson there for all schools, including universities, which try so earnestly to divorce the dissemination of knowledge from the shaping of character. Such distinctions are not so easily made. Students take their moral lessons where they can find them.

One of Whitefield's more surprising attributes is the school's racial integration. Twenty percent of its students are minority – and they achieve at high levels.

Naomi Schaefer Riley is the deputy editor of the Taste page at the Wall Street Journal *and author of* God on the Quad: How Religious Colleges and the Missionary Generation Are Changing America.

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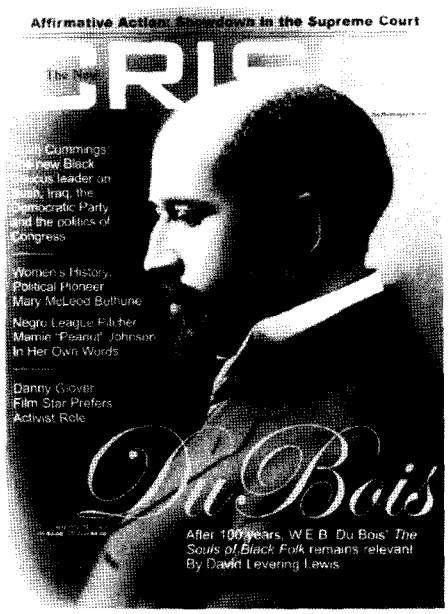

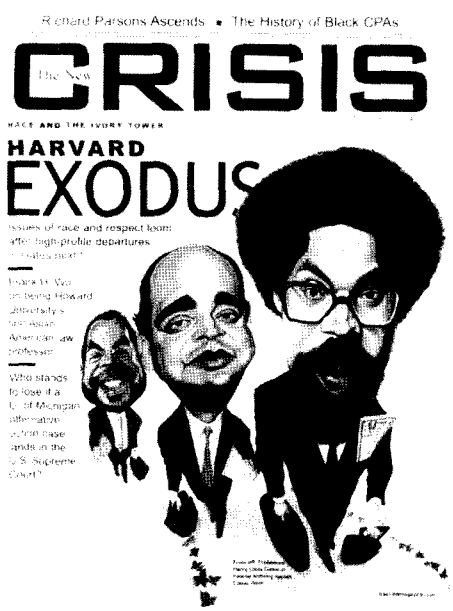

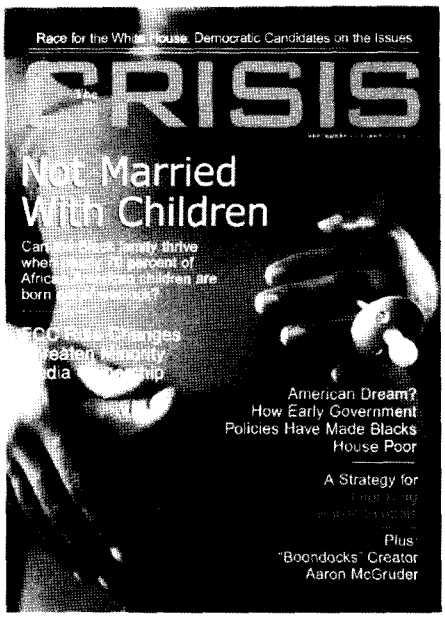

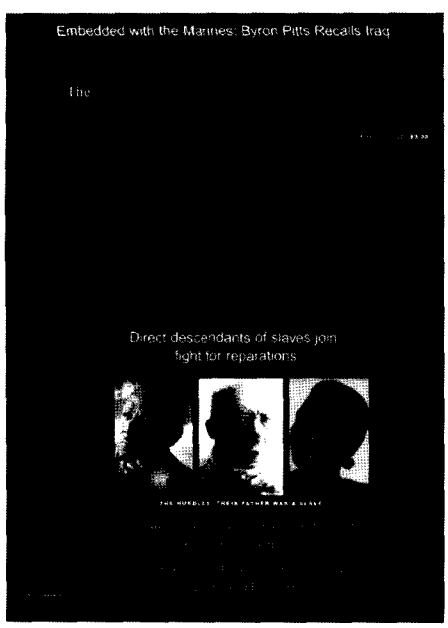

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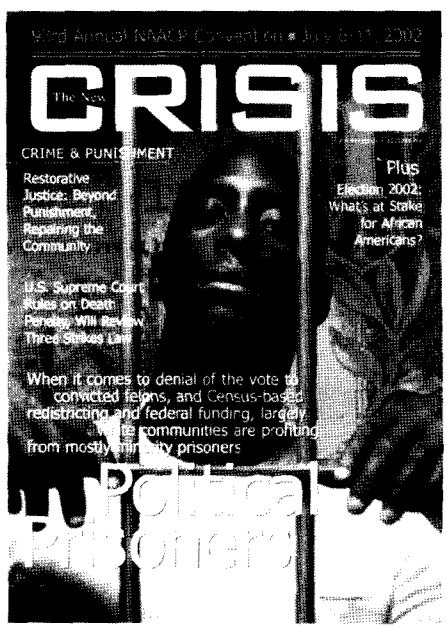

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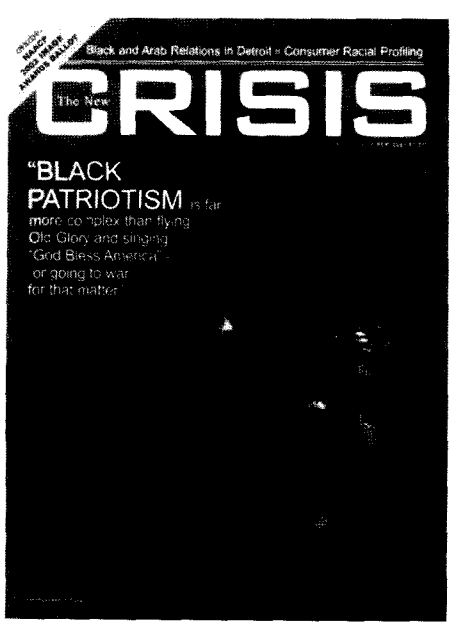

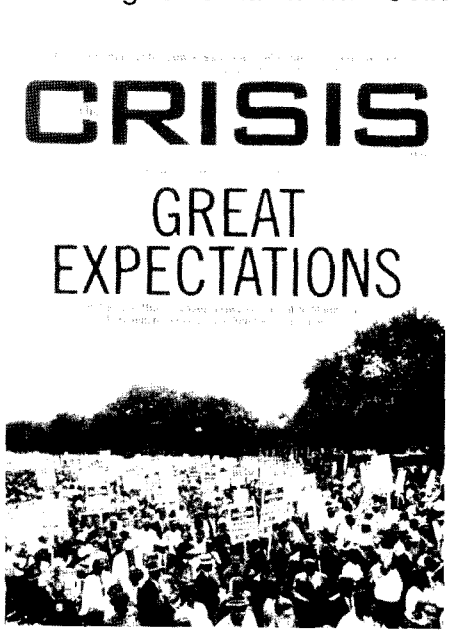

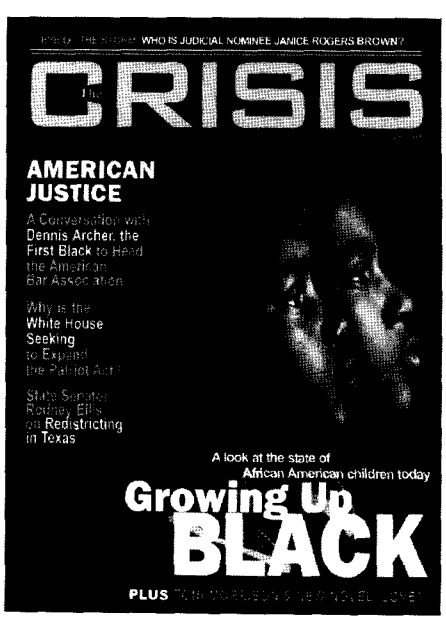

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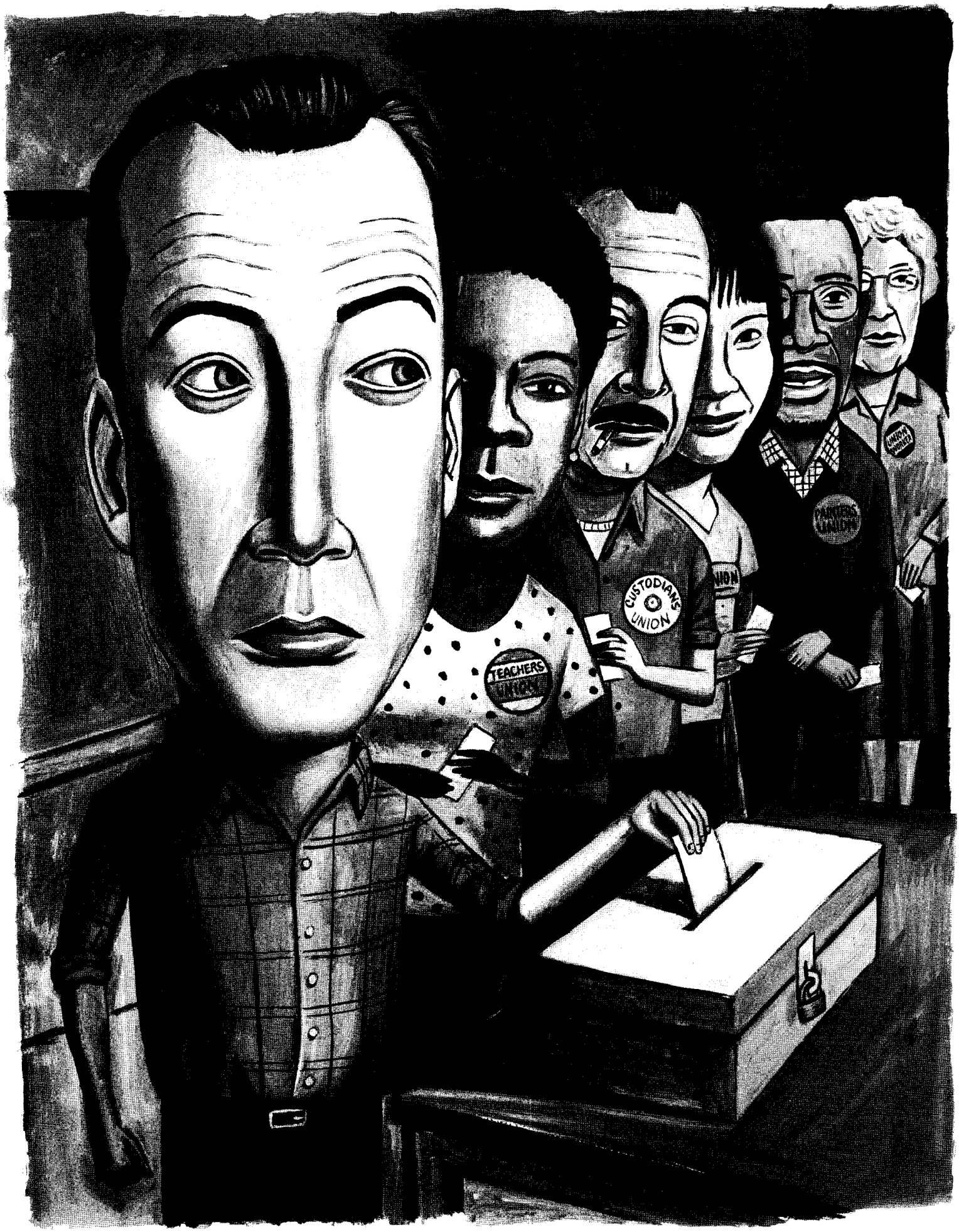

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The Union Label on the Ballot Box

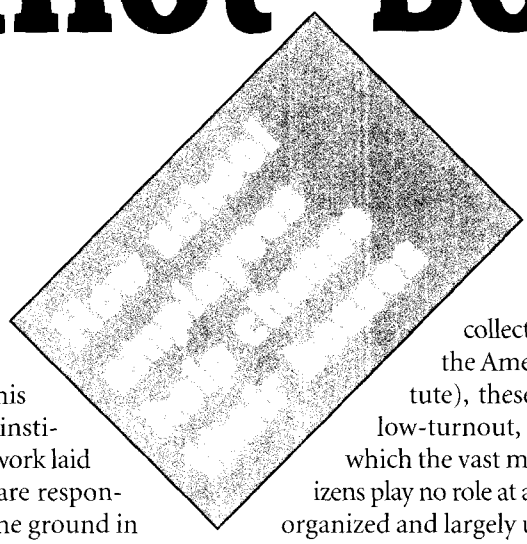

ILLUSTRATION / CHARLES POWELL

Fifteen thousand strong, school boards are among the most numerous of this country's governmental institutions. Within the framework laid down by state and federal law, they are responsible for much of what happens on the ground in American public education. They build schools, select textbooks, design curricula, recruit teachers, award diplomas, set rules for discipline, and oversee a vast array of operations, plans, and policies that shape the education experiences of most American children.

From their origins in the 19th century until the present day, school boards have been regarded as shining examples of local democracy, the keystone that links public education to ordinary citizens. But this is one of the enduring myths of American folklore. The reality is that, while some 96 percent of school boards are elected (according to data collected by Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute), these elections are usually low-turnout, low-interest affairs in which the vast majority of ordinary citizens play no role at all. Special interests, well organized and largely unchecked by the public, often have ample opportunity to engineer outcomes in their own favor.

This is not a good thing for children or schools, but there is nothing surprising about it. Americans are apathetic about almost all aspects of politics; they're just more apathetic about school-board politics. School-board elections are often held at odd times, when no other offices—particularly major ones, like president or governor—are being voted on. Moreover, roughly two-thirds of registered voters are not parents of school-age children and so have only weak incentives to pay attention or participate. To make matters worse, the vast majority

BY TERRY M. MOE

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of these elections, about 89 percent (according to Hess), are nonpartisan; and without party labels to guide them, most voters have no information about the various candidates running for multiple board seats, and so are confused and even more uninterested than they would normally be.

Who Cares?

But apathy stops at the schoolhouse door. One group of local citizens—teachers and other employees of the school district—has an intense interest in everything the district does: how much money it spends, how the money is allocated, how hiring and firing are handled, what work rules are adopted, how the curriculum is determined, which schools are to be opened and closed, and much more. The livelihoods of these people are fully invested in the schools, and they have a far greater material stake in the system than do any other members of the community.

As individuals, then, district employees have strong incentives to get involved in school-board politics and to take action in trying to elect candidates who will promote their occupational interests. The things they want are simple and straightforward—and have nothing to do, at least directly or intentionally, with quality education. They want job security. They want higher wages and fringe benefits. They want better retirement packages. They want work rules that restrict managerial control. They want bigger budgets and higher taxes.

School employees have the additional advantage of being well organized. Unlike parents and other citizens, who are typically atomized and ineffectual as political forces, most school employees are represented by unions. Many of these employee unions get engaged in school affairs. But among them, the teacher unions are almost always the most active and powerful, and they generally take the lead in championing the cause of employee interests in politics.

In school-board elections, the incentives of the teacher unions are strong and clear. If they can wield clout at the polls, they can determine who sits on local school boards—and in so doing, they can literally choose the very "management" they will be bargaining with. (Private sector unions, which square off against independent management teams, can only dream of such a thing.) These same elected board members, moreover, will make decisions on a gamut of policy issues, from budgets to curriculum to student discipline, that teachers have a stake in and can benefit from enormously. Under the circumstances, it would be irrational for the unions *not* to get actively involved in school-board elections.

They have the resources, moreover, to do just that. While unions are nominally collective bargaining organizations, they can readily turn their organizations toward political ends. They also have guaranteed sources of money (member dues) for financing campaigns, paid staff to coordinate political activities, and activist members to do the invaluable trenchwork of campaigning. For these and related reasons, the unions have major advantages over other groups, which can often translate into electoral power.

These advantages also apply in urban settings, where the unions have lots of potential competitors: business, community, ethnic, and religious groups that could (and sometimes do) get involved in school-board elections. Even when these groups are well organized for political action and flush with resources—which is usually not the case—they almost always have social and political agendas that reflect a wide spectrum of public issues, not just education, and they divvy up their resources accordingly. The teacher unions, by contrast, have a vested interest in public education—and only public education—and that is where they focus all their resources and attention.

This doesn't mean that the unions always prevail over other constituencies, nor that they are a dominating political force in all districts. Later in this article, in fact, I'll discuss several basic conditions that place limits on union influence. Still, in the normal course of events, teacher unions tend to have important advantages relative to other groups in both incentives and resources—so, that over the long haul, they often (but not always) succeed in getting their favored candidates into office. As a result, there is good reason to be concerned that the local governance of schools tends to be more responsive to the interests of teachers (and other school employees) than a focused concern for quality education—and the interests of children—would warrant.

Although union power in school-board elections would seem to have vast consequences for public education, it is a subject that is rarely studied. Over the past several years, I have been engaged in a project that tries to do something about that, and I am now in the process of writing articles that present the findings. The findings offer basic, much-needed evidence on what the unions actually do in school-board politics, how successful they are, and what strengths—as well as weaknesses—are most important for an accurate, balanced understanding of their roles in education and its politics.

Here I want to present the results of one of these studies, which focuses on a particularly interesting way that the teacher unions can attempt to influence election outcomes. As I suggested earlier, the unions have many means of influence at their disposal: they can contribute money to candidates, they can unleash their activists to make phone calls and distribute literature, they can pay for advertisements, and so on. But another weapon in their arsenal is the voting power of teachers themselves. If teachers vote at higher rates than ordinary voters, if their allies in other unions do the same, and if ordinary voters turn out at their usual low rates, then employee-favored candidates

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clearly ought to have a systematic advantage. It may not be enough, all by itself, to win the election for them. But when combined with the other union weapons, it may contribute to a winning union strategy.

More specifically, this study of teacher turnout brings evidence to bear on three central questions. First, do teachers and other district employees vote at higher rates than other citizens? Second, are they turning out for reasons that are essentially public spirited, or are they turning out to promote their own occupational self-interest? And third, are the turnout differentials (if any) great enough to be of any consequence in boosting the unions' chances of victory?

A Study of Teacher Turnout

As part of the larger project, I gathered data on the names and zip codes of school district employees in a stratified sample of 70 California school districts, all of them unionized, and I matched these names to county voter files to get each employee's voting history. In the study I'm describing here, I restrict my attention to nine of these districts, all located in Los Angeles and Orange counties. These nine are analytically useful because they are clustered in close proximity to one another, and teachers who don't live in the district where they work often show up as residents of one of the other districts. Being able to compare these two types of teachers—those who live and work in a district, and those who live in one district but work in another—is quite helpful in understanding the basics of teacher turnout, as well as its connection to power.

If this were an analysis of national or state elections, we could go directly to an investigation of turnout, the presumption being that turnout is a measure of electoral clout. Yet when we look specifically at teachers in school-board elections, turnout is a second-order issue. The first-order issue is whether teachers live in the districts where they work, because if they don't, they aren't even eligible to vote. Obviously, this has a lot to do with whether turnout can translate into power. The data show that the percentage of teachers who live in their own districts varies a great deal—from 8 percent to 55 percent in this sample—and tends to increase with the affluence of the district. Even in the more affluent ones, however, a strikingly large percentage of teachers in this sample do not live where they work and thus cannot vote. Other district employees are much more likely to live where they work, regardless of the district's affluence. This enhances their value to the teacher unions as political allies.

It is unclear how representative these findings are of districts generally. Living outside the district is most common when multiple districts are packed into an urban area, as they are in Los Angeles County and Orange County. In districts that are suburban, rural, or geographically spread out, far fewer employees may live outside their own districts. Still, some degree of nonresidency is probably a fact of life in most districts. And to the extent it is, teachers and their allies should have a harder time translating their own turnout into power.

The Turnout Gap

Two types of elections are most relevant to turnout: school-board elections and bond elections, both of which are nonpartisan, meaning that candidates do not carry a party label. For school-board elections, I focus on those that are held during odd years, when there are no general elections for federal and state offices. These elections offer the best opportunity for studying how teachers and other district employees act on their job-related incentives, because little else is being voted on. For bond elections I focus on those that are not held at the same time as general elections or school-board elections.

In school-board elections the incentives of the teacher unions are strong and clear. If they can wield clout at the polls, they can determine who sits on local school boards.... literally choos[ing] the very "management" they will be bargaining with.

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The data show that turnout among the local population is downright abysmal, even in the more affluent districts. In the off-year school-board elections for which I have data, 1997 and 1999, the median turnout of registered voters is 9 percent, as can be seen in Figure 1a. This percentage would be even lower, obviously, if the denominator were the voting-age population as a whole, for many people in the electorate—about a quarter—are not even registered. For bond elections (1998–2000), the turnout is 23 percent (see Figure 1b). In both cases, low turnout gives the unions an opportunity to mobilize support and tip the scale toward candidates they favor.

The data show that voter turnout among the local population is downright abysmal, even in the more affluent districts. Low turnout gives the unions an opportunity to mobilize support and tip the scale toward candidates they favor.

Do teachers vote at high rates compared with average citizens? The answer is clearly yes, as Figures 1a and 1b illustrate. Indeed, if we compute the turnout gap between teachers and average citizens in each district, the median gap over all districts and elections (both school-board and bond) was 36.5 percent, which is a huge number given the very low turnout overall. In 1997, for instance, only 7 percent of registered voters in the Charter Oak school district voted in their school-board election, but 46 percent of the teachers who live there did. In Claremont, 18 percent of registered voters went to the polls, but 57 percent of the teachers who live there did. Similar figures can be recited for *every* district, and the conclusion is the same whether we look at board elections in 1997, board elections in 1999, or bond elections. Teachers who live in their districts were from two to seven times more likely to vote than other citizens were.

Why do teachers turn out at such high rates? The answer may well be that they have an occupational self-interest other citizens don't have. But this claim needs to be tested, for there is clearly a plausible alternative: that teachers are not only better educated and more middle class than the average citizen, but also more public spirited, more committed to public education, and thus more likely to vote in school-board elections regardless of their personal stakes. Can the evidence show that occupational self-interest, and not these other possibilities, accounts for the turnout gap?

The data offer a revealing test. Many teachers in the sample live in one school district but work in another. These teachers are presumably just as middle class, public spirited, and committed to education as other teachers are; but because they don't work in the district where they live, they do *not* have an occupational stake in their local school-board elections. Will these teachers vote at the same high levels as teachers who *do* have such an occupational stake?

Whether we look at the 1997 elections, the 1999 elections, or the various bond elections, the answer is the same: in *every* case that allows a comparison, the teachers who live in a district but don't work there vote at lower rates than the teachers who both live and work there. The size of the difference is almost always substantial (and statistically significant). In Claremont, to take a rather typical example, 57 percent of the teachers who both live and work there voted in the 1997 election, but only 23 percent of the teachers who live but don't work there voted.

A corollary issue is whether teachers who live in a district where they don't work vote at higher rates than ordinary citizens do. Here the answer is less clear, and the low numbers advise caution. Statistical significance aside, these teachers turned out at higher rates than ordinary citizens in 12 of 18 elections, but in 5 they actually turned out at lower rates. Of the cases when they turned out at higher rates, moreover, only six are statistically significant. Across all the school-board and bond elections, the median difference in turnout rates between these teachers and ordinary citizens is just 7 percent, which could be simply due to social class.

Taken together, these findings contradict the idea that the teachers who live and work in a district turn out at high rates because they are public spirited, committed to education, or socially advantaged; they bolster the notion that self-interest is in fact mainly responsible. A plausible addendum,

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however—although I do not have the data to explore it—is that teacher turnout is getting a double boost from self-interest: one because the teachers themselves have an occupational stake in voting and another because their unions have a self-interest in mobilizing them. It seems likely that both are at work, and that the turnout differential is not solely due to the incentives of individual teachers.

Valuable Allies

Now consider the other district employees. This is a heterogeneous group that includes administrators, nurses, and librarians, as well as janitors, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers. The low-paid members of this group, however, far outnumber the high-paid members, and some 40 percent are Hispanic. On class grounds alone, therefore, we would expect these employees to vote at much lower rates than teachers. In more affluent districts (and perhaps others), they should also vote at lower rates than ordinary citizens.

These class-based expectations are quite wrong. In every district with available data, and for all three sets of elections, other district employees who live and work in their districts vote at substantially higher rates than ordinary citizens do—rates that, on average, are just a shade lower than those of teachers who live and work in the district. The median difference in turnout rates between them and the teachers who live in their own districts is just 4 percent, which is stunningly small given the underlying differences in social class. Clearly, something other than class is at work here. And that something is probably that these other employees, just like teachers, approach elections with their own self-interest in mind, and their unions mobilize them on those grounds.

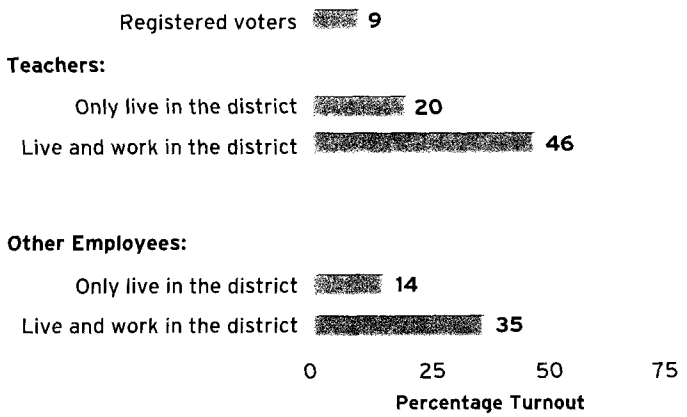
This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that, when we look at other employees who live in a district but don't work there, and thus do not have an occupational stake in the elections, their turnout proves to be decidedly lower on average than that of other employees who both work and live there. The former turn out at lower rates in all of the 16 cases for which there are data, and 13 of these are statistically significant. For all elections, the median difference in voting rates between the two groups is 20 percent, and it is not uncommon for the gap to be much larger.

Civic Duty, Redefined

(Figure 1a)

Teachers and other district employees are much more likely to vote in school elections than ordinary voters, especially if they work in the same district where they live.

Voter Turnout for School-Board Elections in Selected Los Angeles County School Districts, 1997, 1999

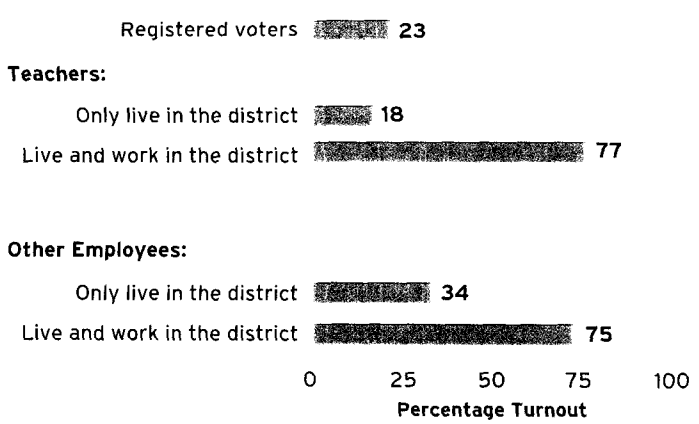


Note: For each category, the percentage represents the median turnout for such voters over the 14 board elections that occurred in these districts.

SOURCE: Author's calculations from school-board election data in Charter Oak Unified, Claremont Unified, Covina Valley Unified, Garvey Elementary, Montebello Unified, Norwalk–La Marida Unified, and Torrance Unified districts

(Figure 1b)

Voter Turnout for School-Bond Elections in Selected Los Angeles and Orange County School Districts, 1998–2000



Note: For each category, the percentage represents the median turnout for such voters over the five special bond elections that occurred in these districts.

SOURCE: Author's calculations from school-bond election data in Claremont Unified (2000), Montebello Unified (1998), Torrance Unified (1998), Huntington Beach City Elementary (1999), and Santa Ana Unified (1999) districts

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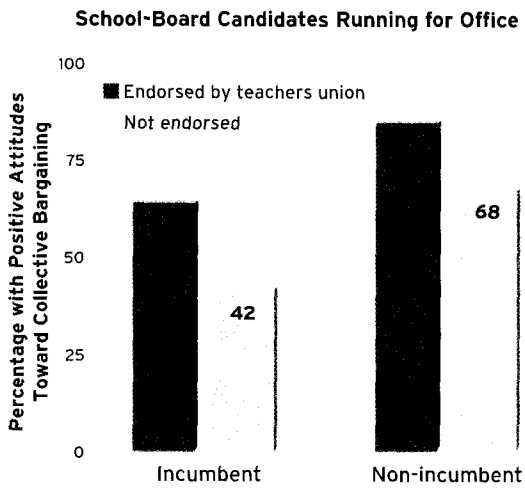
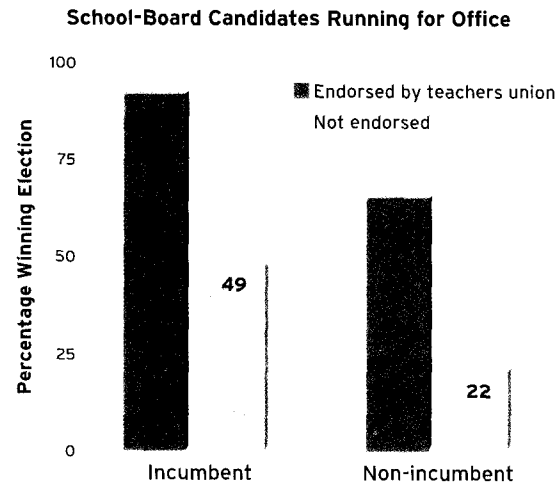
Looking Out for Number One

Among both incumbents and non-incumbents, school-board candidates with positive attitudes toward collective bargaining receive more union support. And, in turn, endorsed candidates are more likely to win elections.

(Figure 2a)



(Figure 2b)



SOURCE: Author's calculations based on a random sample of 526 school-board candidates in 253 California school districts (2000–2003), as reported in "Teachers Unions and School Board Elections," *Besieged: School Boards and the Future of Education Politics* (Brookings, 2005), ed., William G. Howell

As was true for teachers, the other employees who live but don't work in the district tend to look pretty much like ordinary citizens in their turnout rates. The median difference is 8 percent, which is virtually the same advantage we found for teachers. In this case, though, social class obviously does not explain the turnout gap. And because this is so, it is reasonable to suspect that it doesn't explain the differential between teachers and ordinary citizens either. Some other common factor probably accounts for both differentials.

What these teachers and other district employees have in common is that they both take a self-interested approach to elections and they both belong to unions. Because they don't work where they live, they have less incentive to vote and they are not mobilized by the local union (to which they don't belong). But they may also recognize—with reminding by their own unions—that they are all enmeshed in a big collective-action problem, and that they should vote in their home districts to protect one another's jobs and interests. Because voting is not a very costly act, this could easily account for a turnout rate that is 7 to 8 percent above that of ordinary citizens.

This analysis reveals that turnout can be an important resource for teachers and their unions. Teachers turn out at much higher rates than other citizens do, they act on their occupational self-interest, and exactly the same is true of the other district employees. This makes them key political allies and essentially allows the teacher unions to double their voting strength. There is also a downside, however, that weakens their ability to convert these advantages into electoral power. This is the problem of residency. The high turnout rates and the driving force of self-interest are of political value in school-board elections only to the extent that teachers and other employees live in their districts. And many do not.

Slim Margins

Because of the residency problem, turnout is unlikely to be as potent a resource as money or political activism in producing electoral victory. But it can contribute in a positive way to the larger union effort, and in some cases—when elections are close—it can even be pivotal. These cases may be fairly common, in fact, because the margin of victory in school-board elections is often rather small. By my own estimate (based on a separate sample of 245 districts for another study), the median gap between the best-off losing candidate and the worst-off winner is about 3 percent. Thus, in many elections it doesn't take much of a vote swing to change the outcome.

Consider some rough calculations for the Charter Oak school district. In the 1997 election, three candidates competed for two seats. The total number of votes cast (two by each voter) was 3,506, and the margin of victory was 2.54 percent, or 89 votes. Are the turnout differentials in Charter Oak large enough to overcome an 89-vote gap and bring victory to a union-backed candidate? The answer is yes. The district

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had a total of 350 teachers, only 22 percent living in the district and voting at a rate of 46 percent. Thus there were 35 teacher-voters. The district also had 354 other district employees, 50 percent living in the district and voting at a rate of 41 percent. This means that there were 73 voters among the other employees, and, when the teachers are added in, 108 total votes by school personnel. This figure alone exceeds the 89 votes needed for victory, and it makes no allowance for other sources of pro-union votes (such as relatives, friends, or neighbors). Similar calculations could be carried out for the other districts, showing that the turnout differential alone is often sufficient to overcome the margin of victory, or at least comes close.

As I said, these are indications of what can happen in elections that are close, as many are. Not all elections are this close, of course. And we can't really expect all employees to vote as a bloc (although the prime role of occupational self-interest certainly promotes such an outcome). Yet these sorts of calculations help to show that high employee turnout rates can indeed boost the prospects for union victory, even when considerably diluted by the residency problem. And even when turnout is not pivotal to the outcome, it is clearly a resource that works to the unions' advantage, contributing to their larger effort to control electoral outcomes.

More Evidence

I can't report in detail on the rest of the research project, but the findings to date point to two very general themes.

The first addresses the obvious bottom line. It is one thing for the unions to have a capacity for power through the various resources that they control, but it is quite another for them to put that capacity to effective use—which, in the end, is what really counts. The question we ultimately need to answer is: to what extent are unions successful at getting their favored candidates elected to office?

The answer is that they are quite successful indeed. The most direct evidence comes from a study of 245 California school district elections and the 1,228 candidates who competed in them during the years 1998–2001. A multivariate statistical analysis shows that, for candidates who are not incumbents, teacher union support increases the probability of winning substantially. Indeed, it is roughly equal to, and may well exceed, the impact of incumbency itself.

The comparison with incumbency is instructive. These are low-information, low-interest elections, and because incumbents tend to be well-known, effective campaigners, and relatively well funded, there is every reason to expect the power of incumbency to be considerable. My statistical estimates show that it is. That the estimates for union impact are comparable, then, says a lot about the lofty level at which the unions are playing the political game. They are heavy hitters.

When unions succeed in getting non-incumbents elected to school boards, these people become incumbents the next time around. Then their probability of victory is boosted not just by their union support, but also by the power of incumbency.

Their total influence, in fact, appears to be even greater over the long haul. When the unions succeed in getting non-incumbents elected to school boards, these people become incumbents the next time around. Then their probability of victory is boosted not just by their union support, but also by the power of incumbency. When the two factors are combined, as they are when union winners run for reelection, the candidates are virtually unbeatable.

Another study, based on interviews with 526 school-board candidates (winners and losers) in 253 California districts, reinforces the study of electoral outcomes (see Figure 2). The interviews suggest that the teacher unions are typically the most powerful participants in school-board elections and that their power is common across districts of all sizes (and not restricted to large urban districts). They also provide evidence that union electoral clout has genuine substantive consequences: the candidates supported by the unions, as well as the

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candidates who win, are considerably more sympathetic toward collective bargaining than the other candidates.

Union-backed candidates are more likely to believe, for example, that collective bargaining promotes good teaching, fosters professionalism, and helps to raise academic performance, and they are inclined to take a more positive view of unions and their activities. With board members of this type, and thus with "management" teams they have helped to choose, the unions are in a good position to get board decisions on personnel, policy, and other governmental issues that are responsive to their interests.

This study of candidates, however, also provides evidence for a second important theme about union power: namely, that the unions operate under constraints that limit what they can achieve. Yes, they are powerful, but they don't always dominate, and they can't have everything they want. In particular:

- They sometimes face opposition from other organized groups, especially in large urban districts. When this happens, business groups are the most likely to represent effective opposition.
- Because incumbents have their own bases of power, they can be more difficult for the unions to defeat than other candidates. As a result, the unions sometimes support incumbents who are not as pro-union as the unions would like in order not to alienate an eventual winner.
- Because voting patterns are shaped by the political culture of a district, unions in conservative districts sometimes find themselves supporting candidates who are less pro-union than they would like in order not to lose.
- After election to the school board, the experience of being on the board—and part of "management"—seems to make members somewhat less pro-union over time; as a result, the unions cannot count on gaining complete control of school boards even when they are continually successful in elections.

It would be extreme, then, to say that the unions totally dominate their school boards. But there is still a serious problem. School-board elections are supposed to be the democratic means by which ordinary citizens govern their own schools. The board is supposed to represent "the people." But in many districts it really doesn't. For with unions so powerful, employee interests are given far more weight in personnel and policy decisions than warranted, and school boards are partially captured by their own employees. Democracy threatens to be little more than a charade, serving less as a mechanism of popular control than as a means by which employees promote their own special interests.

Union-backed candidates are more likely to believe that collective bargaining promotes good teaching, fosters professionalism, and helps to raise academic performance.

Terry M. Moe is professor of political science at Stanford University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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Climb Every Mountain

Teachers who think they should make a difference ... do!

The basics of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—adequate yearly progress benchmarks, provision of supplemental services, and a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom—are known. And the intense scrutiny of the "how to" of those basics has resulted in a mix of impassioned criticism and effusive praise. But what has been left largely unexamined in the hubbub is perhaps the law's central, if unspoken, principle: that a serious commitment to learning-for-all can help make it so.

Indeed, the NCLB legislation calls for "greater responsibility" from teachers and schools for student learning. Yet we know very little about whether a teacher's own sense of responsibility for that learning makes any difference to student achievement. We know even less about how to nurture that sense of responsibility. I set out to explore both questions.

My study of a nationally representative sample of 1st graders and their teachers suggests that teachers who take personal responsibility for student learning can improve student achievement; specifically, children with teachers who have a greater sense of responsibility for student outcomes learn more in reading during the 1st grade. Unfortunately, the findings presented here also suggest that the teachers of economically disadvantaged students, the very students NCLB targets as most in need of teachers and schools that take responsibility for their learning, are less likely to take responsibility for student outcomes.

The way forward, however, should not be dedicated solely to the daunting task of identifying, hiring, and retaining more responsible teachers. I found that a teacher's work environment has a strong relationship with

BY LAURA LOGERFO

ILLUSTRATION / STEPHEN KONZ

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her commitment to student learning. Teachers who report that their school's leadership is supportive of their efforts in the classroom have a much greater sense of responsibility, as do teachers in Catholic schools. Improving the quality of school leadership could also be an effective means of staffing our nation's classrooms with responsible teachers.

Teacher Responsibility and Student Learning

To find out whether a teacher's sense of responsibility affects student learning, I first had to define the terms. I determined that a teacher has a sense of responsibility when she willingly accepts credit for students' positive outcomes *and* also accepts blame for their negative outcomes. Rather than attribute poor grades or low test scores to faults within students or to deficits in their backgrounds, responsible teachers attribute much of the cause to their own efforts and behavior. At its best, responsibility represents a teacher's commitment to make learning happen for her students.

And though student achievement is easily defined, I did have to account for a host of other potential influences on it, including other teacher characteristics (such as certification status, post-college coursework, and years of experience as a 1st-grade teacher), the student's social background (family income), classroom characteristics (average family income, percent minority), and, most important, the student's previous achievement (kindergarten test score). Accounting for such social and academic background characteristics does temper the concern that teachers with strong senses of responsibility are more likely to select high-achieving students.

To capture the strength of a teacher's sense of responsibility for student learning, I took advantage of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS–K) prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The ECLS–K is the only national data set that links information on teachers' attitudes to student outcomes. It is based on periodic surveys that track information on a nationally representative sample of elementary-school students, their teachers, and the 1,280 public and private schools they attend. I focused my research on 1st-grade teachers of students who had been surveyed as kindergartners in 1998, the study's first year. The study sampled students, not teachers, so my findings may be generalized to teachers of a nationally representative sample of 1st-grade students, but not a nationally representative sample of 1st-grade teachers. But the sample of teachers does look fairly representative. Nearly 20 percent of the 1st-grade teachers are of minority ethnicity, and more than one-third have earned a master's degree.

A teacher's answers to four survey items were summed to create an index of the strength of a teacher's sense of responsibility for student learning. Teachers were asked to respond to certain statements by locating their attitudes on a 5-point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5, strongly agree. In building the index, I reversed the values of the responses to the last three items: the more a teacher agreed with the statements that students were not capable of something, the lower she would score on the teacher responsibility index. I tracked teacher agreement with four statements:

- I make a difference in the lives of the children I teach.
- Many of the children I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them.
- The level of child misbehavior (noise, horseplay, or fighting) in this school interferes with my teaching.
- Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my teaching.

The latter two items focus on problems or costs in the school environment that teachers may believe prevent them from instructing children effectively. Unruly children or excessive paperwork, for example, can become a reason teachers do not feel responsible for achieving instructional goals; the problem, they may say, lies with the students or with the school. Routine duties and paperwork

Rather than attribute poor grades or low test scores to faults within students or to deficits in their backgrounds, responsible teachers attribute much of the cause to their own efforts and behavior.

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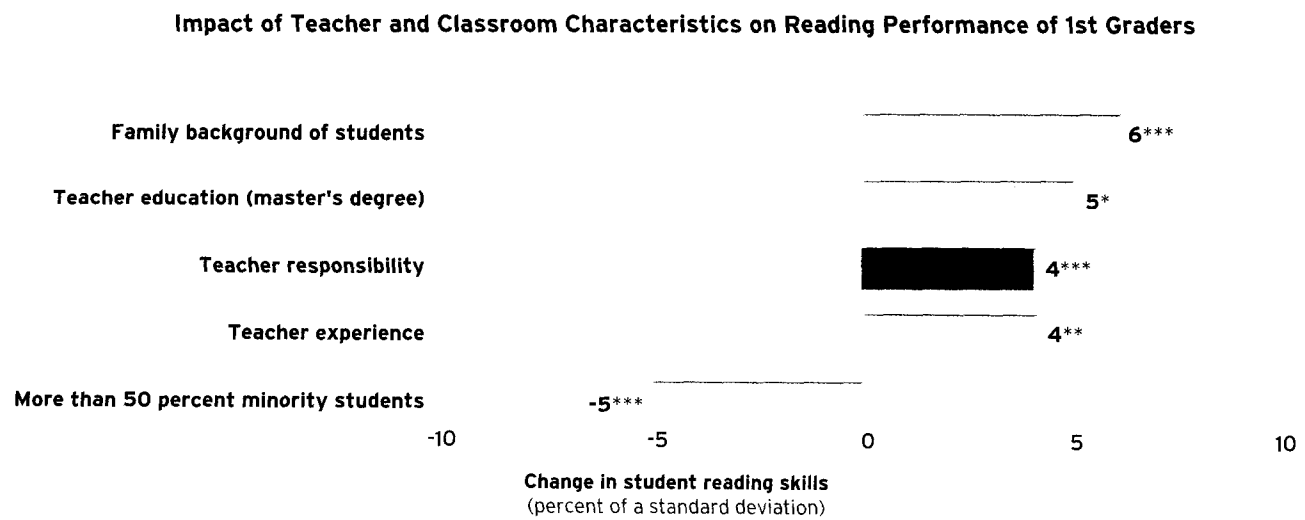
can also shift teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals in charge of, and responsible for, children's learning to a perception of themselves as hassled paperpushers. Teachers can thus attribute their failure to reach instructional goals to a lack of time and energy caused by being overwhelmed by chores that bear little relevance to their classroom. They become responsible for paperwork, not pedagogy.

Although they are not as highly correlated as most index items designed in advance for a particular purpose, the four items I use to construct the responsibility scale are all positively correlated with one another at statistically significant levels (0.09–0.28). Just a tenth of the 1st-grade teachers consider their very young students incapable of learning. Teachers' responses to this question do not vary widely, and the modal response is "disagree." However, these are very young children who have a relatively short history of achievement. The fact that 10 percent of teachers think that by age six these students cannot learn is significant. More than a fifth of the teachers in the sample consider children's misbehavior somewhat of a concern in their attempts to teach. About 17 percent agree or strongly agree that misbehavior in the school affects their teaching. An overwhelming majority of teachers (95 percent) agree that they make a difference in children's lives. Not surprisingly, the most variation exists in teachers' answers to the paperwork question, with the modal response "agree" and the median response "neither agree nor disagree." Agreement and disagreement are approximately equal on whether paperwork is a problem.

First-grade reading achievement was measured with scores on a standardized reading test given to students near the end of the 1st grade as part of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS). I focus on the reading test because literacy skills are more heavily emphasized than arithmetic in school curricula for the early grades.

Carry That Weight (Figure 1)

Reading performance is higher in classrooms where teachers feel responsible for their students' education. Having a responsible teacher is almost as important to student outcomes as a student's family background and whether the teacher has a master's degree.



*** significant at the 0.001 level
** significant at the 0.01 level
* significant at the 0.1 level

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort," 1998–2000

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In an effort to measure more precisely each child's performance, the test was tailored to each student. A first stage provided a rough estimate of a student's achievement level, and students' performance here determined the difficulty of the items in the second stage of the assessment. By giving students questions that were appropriate to their level of cognitive development, researchers could more accurately pinpoint a student's achievement level. The most basic test items required students to identify upper- and lower case letters of the alphabet. The most advanced items asked students to determine the meaning of potentially unfamiliar words from context. The raw scores on the assessments were standardized to allow for comparison across grade levels.

Throughout my analysis of the test-score data, I accounted for differences in previous student achievement, according to ECLS results, by adjusting for each student's achievement at the end of kindergarten. I also adjusted the 1st-grade achievement measure to account for differences in instructional time spent in kindergarten and first grade.

Responsibility Matters

My results show that a teacher's sense of responsibility for student learning does seem to make a positive difference in a student's reading achievement at the end of 1st grade. An increase of one standard deviation in the strength of a teacher's sense of responsibility is correlated with an increase in a student's 1st-grade reading skills of .04 of a standard deviation (see Figure 1).

This seemingly small amount is important. The data show that about 10 percent of the difference between teachers in 1st-grade reading achievement can be explained by characteristics of the teacherTeacher responsibility alone can explain as much as 4 percent of this variation between teachers. I found this to be as large a relationship as two traditional indicators of teacher's quality: whether the teacher holds a master's degree and years of experience as a 1st-grade teacher. This result is particularly important in light of the fact that much of a teacher's contribution to student achievement remains unexplained.

Because this study was a snapshot in time of 1st-grade teachers and their students during one school year, I cannot claim with complete certainty that a teacher's sense of responsibility *causes* increases in student achievement. It is a chicken-and-egg problem: did the teacher's sense of responsibility improve student achievement, or do high-achieving students make a teacher more likely to take responsibility for her students? At least with respect to student achievement, however, the data do provide hints as to what is cause and what is effect. While a teacher's sense of responsibility is not related to the average *previous* academic achievement level of a class, it is associated with the achievement gains individual students make while they are in her classroom. This strongly suggests that teacher responsibility affects achievement, not vice versa.

Identifying Committed Teachers

Since teachers who hold themselves accountable help students learn more, we should want to know who these teachers are and where they work. I measured the relationship between an individual teacher's sense of responsibility and his or her personal and professional background, attitudes toward work (including job satisfaction), students' social class (average family income), and the characteristics of the school in which she taught. I found that 70 percent of the variation in teacher responsibility can be traced to the background characteristics of the teachers and of their students, while the remaining 30 percent is attributable to school environment. A teacher's gender or ethnicity makes no difference in her level of responsibility. When we look at professional background, teachers who have completed more coursework in education express a slightly weaker sense of responsibility than those with less coursework. Other professional background characteristics,

An increase in the strength of a teacher's sense of responsibility is correlated with an increase in a student's first-grade reading skills.

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however, are unrelated to teacher responsibility. Teacher certification and experience, two of the cornerstones of NCLB's "highly qualified" teacher requirements, are not associated with having this commitment.

In contrast to the background characteristics, teachers' attitudes are related to responsibility. As a teacher's satisfaction with her work increases, her sense of responsibility for student outcomes rises substantially. An increase in job satisfaction of one standard deviation leads to a 0.35 standard deviations increase in responsibility. (See Figure 2.) But teachers who believe that children should know basic reading skills before reaching 1st grade are less likely to hold themselves accountable for student learning. An increase of one standard deviation in expectations about student preparation is associated with a 0.05 standard deviation reduction in responsibility.

Perhaps surprisingly, the same negative relationship exists between a teacher's endorsement of daily homework for 1st graders and responsibility. First-grade teachers who expect students to arrive at school with basic reading skills and who endorse daily homework may wish to downplay their responsibility and highlight parents' and children's responsibility for school success. Teachers with greater confidence in their instruction of learning-disabled students or students with limited English proficiency have a greater sense of responsibility (each associated with an increase of 0.06 standard deviations).

My findings also suggest that teacher responsibility is related to the characteristics of the students in the teacher's classroom. Student characteristics may influence teachers' expectations for student success and teachers' attitudes toward responsibility for their learning. Previous research has shown that teachers tend to perceive students from lower-income families as inadequately prepared for school and to set lower achievement expectations for them than for students from higher-income families. In line with these earlier studies, I find that the less financially well-off a teacher's students are, the less responsibility she takes for their learning (a decrease of 0.18 standard deviations in responsibility for each standard deviation decrease in family income).

School Environment and Teacher Responsibility

The characteristics of a teacher's students matter, but they are less important than where a teacher works. After we adjust for the teacher and student influences, school environment explains almost one-third of the differences in teacher responsibility. Teachers who work in small schools (fewer than 300 students) and in schools with less than 50 percent minority enrollment had a greater sense of responsibility for student learning.

Regardless of the other characteristics of a school, supportive administrative leadership can make a substantial difference in whether teachers hold themselves accountable for student learning. If a school's teachers think that school leaders set and support clear goals for teachers and have the ability to protect and encourage staff, individual teacher's responsibility scores tend to be higher. It is interesting that teachers' sense of professional community, faculty collaboration, and teacher empowerment, which could all reasonably be thought of as influenced by the school administration, were unrelated to teacher responsibility.

The Catholic School Advantage

Teachers in Catholic schools scored 0.28 standard deviations higher on the responsibility index than their public-school counterparts did. This could be explained by the commitment held by many Catholic schools to creating a strong community and to helping all students learn.

It is possible that the most responsible teachers may choose to work in Catholic schools, which can be selective in their student admissions, in order to teach children with more academic and social advantages. In fact, the Catholic-school students in this study have higher average academic abilities and higher average family incomes than students in public

Teachers who have completed more coursework in education express a slightly weaker sense of responsibility. Certification and experience are not associated with this commitment.

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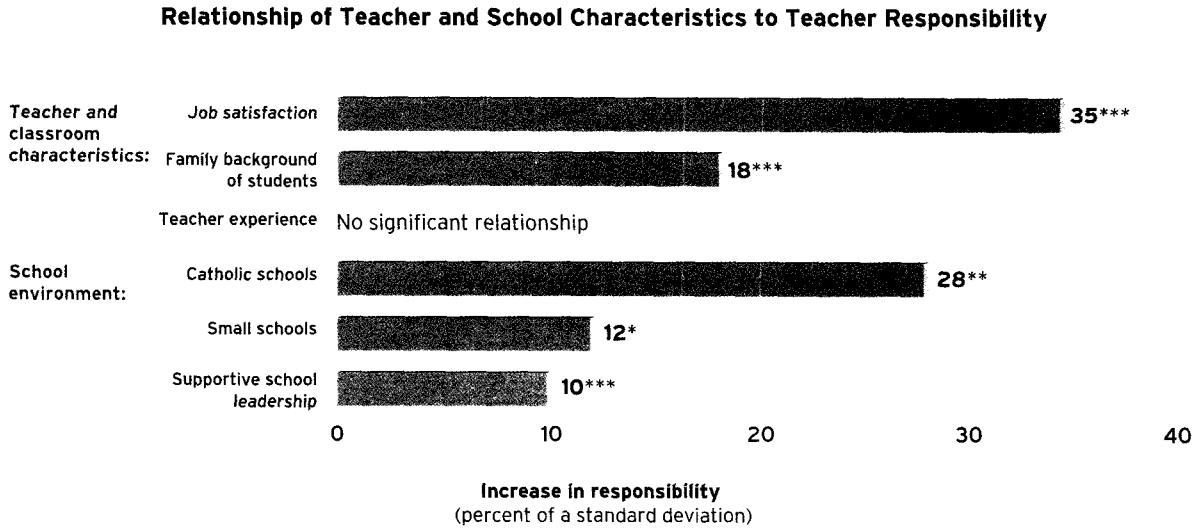
Making a Responsible Teacher (Figure 2)

The degree to which teachers hold themselves accountable for student outcomes appears to be strongly related to other teacher traits and to the environment in which they teach.



*** significant at the 0.001 level
** significant at the 0.01 level
* significant at the 0.1 level

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort," 1998–2000

schools. Yet the Catholic-school benefit to teacher responsibility persists even after accounting for the measured characteristics of a school's student body.

Of course, it may be that teachers who choose to work in Catholic schools are already committed to the respect, care, and other values that they know many Catholic schools espouse. The Catholic-school finding might also be disguising unmeasured characteristics of students—such as good behavior—that make teachers more likely to accept responsibility for the students' outcomes. These possibilities make it difficult to sort out whether it is the Catholic school, the reason the teacher accepted employment at the school, the unmeasured student characteristics, or some combination of these that strengthens a teacher's sense of responsibility for student learning.

Teachers in Catholic schools scored higher on the responsibility index than their public school counterparts did.

A Prescription for Accountable Teachers

What can be done to staff classrooms with teachers who take more responsibility for student learning? Although NCLB requires that schools have "highly qualified" teachers, a category defined by certification and experience, my analysis indicates that responsibility is not linked to these characteristics. It is easy to see why the law's authors chose the approach they did: academic qualifications are far more easily identifiable by principals making hiring decisions than

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intangible attributes such as a sense of responsibility.

Yet some organizations have sought out teachers with such characteristics as teachers' enthusiasm for work and sense of responsibility for student learning. Teach for America (TFA) administrators, for instance, consider these to be among the most important attributes in good teacher candidates. And the TFA application process has been shaped to tease them out, including a daylong interview session with 12 candidates, during which trained interviewers look for evidence of a prospective teacher's responsibility quotient.

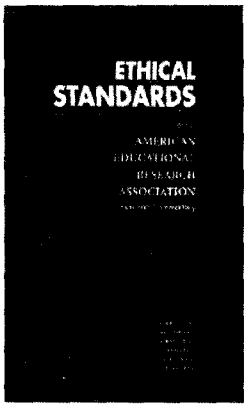
Public schools should incorporate some of these same recruitment and selection techniques. Currently, some school districts sift through résumés to hire personnel, or rely upon quick meetings with candidates at large job fairs. It is doubtful that district officials in charge of hiring decisions can tell if teachers possess the personal attributes to lead a classroom after such brief meetings. Even if the one-on-one, extended interview that TFA conducts is too time-consuming and costly for a school district, people with hiring power could meet with teacher candidates one-on-one and ask pertinent, piercing questions about the candidates' approaches to solving problems that commonly arise in teaching. And analyzing a candidate's answers to questions like the ones posed by ECLS–K investigators during their study, in addition to the routine résumé review, could give districts a much better idea which prospective teachers are willing to hold themselves accountable for a student's progress.

In the meantime, we should look to the quality of school leadership to bolster a sense of commitment among teachers. Supportive school leadership seems to create the environment in which teachers willingly accept responsibility for students' progress and in which students learn.

Laura LoGerfo is a research associate at the Urban Institute's Education Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

Essential Reading—*THE* Educational Guide to Ethical Standards

Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association: Cases and Commentary



Published in 2002

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Since 1987, *The Concord Review*, the only quarterly journal in the world for the academic work of high school students, has published 66 issues with 726 history papers by students from 44 states and 33 other countries. Essays of around 5,500 words, with (Turabian) endnotes and bibliography, on any historical topic (ancient or modern, domestic or foreign), may be submitted, with a completed copy of the Form to Accompany Essays, and a check for $40 made out to The Concord Review, to: The Concord Review, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776. We publish about 8% of the essays we receive. William R. Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions at Harvard College, has said: "We have been very happy to have reprints of essays published in *The Concord Review*, submitted by a number of our applicants over the years, to add to the information we consider in making admission decisions...All of us here in the Admissions Office are big fans of *The Concord Review*."

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The National Writing Board, founded in 1998, has now given an independent, unbiased assessment of high school history papers from 31 states, and sent each author a three-page report, with scores and comments, which she/he has asked us to send to college admissions officers (at 75 colleges so far), or simply could use as feedback on one of her/his best history research papers. History research papers of two lengths—around 2,000 words, or around 5,000 words—with (Turabian) endnotes and bibliography, may be submitted, with a notarized Submission Form and a check for $100, made out to the National Writing Board, to: the National Writing Board, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, Massachusetts 01776. The following colleges and universities now endorse this independent assessment service for academic writing: Amherst, Bowdoin, Carnegie Mellon, Claremont McKenna, Colgate, Connecticut College, Cooper Union, Dartmouth, Duke, Eckerd, Emory, George Mason, Georgetown, Hamilton, Harvard, Haverford, Illinois Wesleyan, Lafayette, Lehigh, Michigan, Middlebury, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Pitzer, Princeton, Reed, Richmond, Sarah Lawrence, Shimer, Smith, Spelman, Tufts, Trinity (CT), the University of Virginia, Washington and Lee, Williams, and Yale.

Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes

The Emerson Prizes ($3,000) have now been awarded to 45 students, published in *The Concord Review*, who have shown outstanding academic promise in history at the high school level since 1995. The twelfth annual award ceremony was hosted by The Governor's Academy in Byfield, MA, on April 23, 2006. The five laureates this year were from California, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington, DC. Past laureates have come from Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Czechoslovakia, Florida, Illinois, Japan, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, New Zealand, Ontario, Russia, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Washington State.

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The National History Club, founded in 2002, now has more than 5,500 members in secondary school history club chapters in 39 states. Our Newsletter is online at http://www.tcr.org. Our goal is the promotion of the reading, writing, discussion, and pleasures of history among secondary school teachers and students of history. There is no fee for joining. If your school would like to apply for a charter, please send the names and addresses of all of your members and the faculty advisor to: Robert Nasson, Executive Director, National History Club, 730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24, Sudbury, MA 01776, email: nasson@tcr.org.

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The two different submission forms for *The Concord Review* and the National Writing Board may each be found on this website, which has had more than 326,000 visitors, and since 1997 has been mirrored on a server in Singapore for the use of history teachers in Asia. This site also has 60 sample essays, including all of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize winners from the last ten years, and information on the National History Club, now with chapters in 39 states. If you have any questions, please log on and leave a message for Will Fitzhugh at fitzhugh@tcr.org, or call (800) 331-5007.

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Donkey in Disguise

Jack Jennings and the Center on Education Policy

Checked (all titles published by the Center on Education Policy):

From the Capital to the Classroom, Year 1 (January 2003), *Year 2* (January 2004), *Year 3* (March 2005)

State High School Exit Exams series: A Baseline Report (August 2002), *Put to the Test* (August 2003), *A Maturing Reform* (August 2004)

States Try Harder, but Gaps Persist: State High School Exit Exams 2005 (August 2005)

Pay Now or Pay Later: The Hidden Costs of High School Exit Exams (May 2004)

School Vouchers: What We Know and Don't Know . . . and How We Could Learn More (June 2000)

Do We Still Need Public Schools? (1996)

ILLUSTRATION / DARREN THOMPSON

Checked by Greg Forster

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the proliferation of high school exit exams, the success of school choice initiatives, and a dozen other smaller if more bitter battles, education has become one of the hottest policy topics in Washington. That means there's a booming market for education experts, especially those who claim to speak with the disinterested voice of reason among the gaggle of partisan squawkers and interest groups. Jack Jennings, a one-time king of Capitol Hill education policy and now head of the Center on Education Policy (CEP), is one such expert.

Jennings and the CEP (he founded the organization in 1995) provide research and expert opinion on a variety of education issues. Jennings is one of the mainstream press's favorite go-to guys on education. He and the CEP appear frequently in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* commenting on education issues and are variously described as "nonpartisan" (*Times*, January 27, 2004; March 14, 2004; *Post*, March 16, 2004), "nonprofit" (*Times*, August 18, 2004; February 7, 2006), "a research group" (*Times*, April 4, 2005;

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The media see Jennings and the CEP as the voices of education research and reason, an enviable position at a time when nonpartisans are hard to come by. He uses this perch to promote findings that he says are the result of empirical research.

May 11, 2005), and "independent" (*Post*, February 19, 2004; August 29, 2004; March 24, 2005). The *Post*'s David Broder called the CEP "an independent advocate for more effective public schools" (March 13, 2004). And on March 26 of this year, the *Times* turned over its most valuable piece of real estate—two columns on the top of the Sunday front page—to Jennings and CEP to announce, two days before it was even released, a CEP study on NCLB's impact on curriculum, again calling the organization "nonpartisan."

The media seem to see Jennings and the CEP as the voices of education research and reason, an enviable position at a time when nonpartisans are hard to come by. Jennings uses this highly desirable media perch to promote findings that he says are the result of empirical research conducted by the CEP. He says, for instance, that NCLB is too strict and is underfunded, that its more controversial requirements are unworkable and should be scrapped, that only big new state spending can help kids pass exit exams, and that school choice is unproved and dangerous. Is this nonpartisanship or something else?

Accidental Social Science

Jack Jennings wasn't always a professional "independent," "nonpartisan" researcher. In fact, for the better part of three decades (from 1967 to 1994) he was one of the most powerful education policymakers on Capitol Hill, as a Democratic staffer for the House Education and Labor Committee at a time when the Democrats completely controlled the House. His influence over federal education policy was enormous: he worked on every major education bill that went through Congress in those years. It is not surprising that education journalists would still turn to a prominent policymaker like Jennings for quotations. But how does a lifelong partisan congressional staffer change his spots and become a disinterested professional researcher who follows the evidence wherever it leads?

The answer, in this case, is that he doesn't.

One of the CEP's most important publications, for instance, is an annual study of the effects of NCLB and its associated rules and regulations, "From the Capital to the Classroom." These annual volumes make assertions about empirical facts ("students' scores on the state tests used for NCLB are rising"; or "lack of capacity is a serious problem that could undermine the success of NCLB") and provide policy recommendations ("some requirements of NCLB are overly stringent, unworkable, or unrealistic"; "the need for funding will grow, not shrink, as more schools are affected by the law's accountability requirements"). On March 24, 2005, the *Post* carried a wire report hailing last year's CEP study as "the most comprehensive review of the three-year-old No Child Left Behind law." The story opened with the claim: "States will not come close to reaching all the struggling children unless the government spends more and lightens demands, according to an independent analysis."

Education professionals looking for a detailed review of the policies, procedures, and regulations used under NCLB will find much that is useful in these annual studies and other CEP publications on NCLB. The CEP has also debunked some of the more intemperate claims about NCLB that have arisen from both sides of the political aisle.

The trouble with the studies is that they do not gather data about the issues they purport to examine. The authors have read large volumes of legal, regulatory, and administrative documents related to NCLB. This puts them in a good position to know, in detail, exactly what policies are being set. However, the CEP claims to be studying not what the policies are, but how they are implemented and how they are affecting education. To examine implementation the CEP relies exclusively on surveys of state education officials and interviews with public school staff. In other words, CEP researchers report as facts what the public school system says about how things are going in the public school system.

The CEP does not hide its methods. The studies quite openly attribute their

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Jack Jennings: A Lifelong Democrat

Before founding the Center on Education Policy in 1995, John F. (Jack) Jennings had a career that would be the envy of any loyal Democrat. Growing up with a "typical ethnic Catholic background" in Chicago in the 1950s, as he told *Education Week* in a 1994 profile, his early career choices were limited to "one of the three Ps—priest, politician, or policeman. My mother wouldn't let me be a policeman, so I chose the seminary." But Jennings gave up the idea of becoming a priest and enrolled at Loyola University, where he got an early taste of the third P, joining the College Democrats. Later, while studying law at Northwestern University, he worked as a precinct captain for the local Democratic ward committeeman, Representative Roman Pucinski, who was elected to Congress in 1959. Pucinski brought the young Jennings to Washington in 1967 and gave him a job as staff director of the Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education. In 1973 Jennings was promoted to associate counsel of the subcommittee by Representative Carl Perkins (D-Ky.) and soon became the full committee's general counsel. During his long tenure, Jennings saw his influence grow substantially. His thumbprint is on nearly each major piece of education legislation—from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to the Higher Education Act—passed or reauthorized during the years when Democrats controlled Capitol Hill. "Colleagues and lobbyists describe Mr. Jennings as at once disarming and demanding," commented *Education Week* at the end of Jennings's 27-year Capitol Hill career, "a consensus builder and a partisan."

— Peter Meyer

findings to surveys and interviews. Phrases like "officials told us that..." and "according to the teachers we interviewed..." appear here and there. Nonetheless, both the studies themselves and Jennings's public comments about them present the findings as scientifically confirmed facts, not merely as the claims made by public school officials and staff. They rely on the accuracy of these claims as a basis for policy recommendations.

Survey and interview data need not be dismissed across the board as unscientific. A survey using scientific methods—such as random sample generation and, where appropriate, credible assurances of anonymity for interviewees—can produce legitimate empirical data on many subjects. But the CEP is investigating the merits of an accountability system by asking the opinion of the institution that is being held accountable.

The CEP also claims that its annual NCLB reports include "case studies" of numerous districts. Use of the term case studies creates an impression that some kind of scientific data gathering was involved in at least some localities. But at the back of the study, we find out that the case studies are simply a more extensive set of interviews, including site visits to conduct in-person interviews. "Other research" was involved, though not identified or described, and there is no sign that it involved any independent collection of data.

What the CEP does when it studies NCLB implementation is barely distinguishable from public relations work. It ascertains the public schools' party line and then broadcasts it as fact.

Partisan Assumptions, Predictable Conclusions

The party line has been fairly consistent: public schools support the goals of NCLB, but they need more money and more "flexibility" from Washington to accomplish these goals. Sure enough, the CEP consistently finds that NCLB's goals are laudable and that schools are refocusing their efforts on raising achievement among disadvantaged groups. This finding is always followed by claims that schools need lots more money to produce real improvement and that the most challenging NCLB requirements are unreasonable and need to be relaxed.

In the foreword to the first report in the series "From the Capital to the Classroom," Jennings compares NCLB to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). "Some critics of the original ESEA say that it failed because it provided money without accountability, and that the NCLB Act will succeed because it requires strict accountability," he wrote. "The ESEA of 1965 may have offered money without much education accountability, but the NCLB Act demands heavy accountability without much greater federal financial and technical assistance—an approach no more likely to succeed."

The trouble with this reasoning is that the school system still has all the extra resources we have been pouring into it since 1965. In other words, schools now have both very high spending levels and accountability.

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The CEP studies' factual claims and the policy recommendations that are their main purpose have no scientific basis. They should be taken for what they are: the public school system's party line, not valid empirical research.

Isn't this exactly the combination Jennings says he wants?

The dynamic that's really at work in these studies becomes particularly clear as the studies are read in succession. The first came out in January 2003, when state fiscal crises had been in the headlines. The CEP found, "The fiscal crisis in most states, coupled with the prospect of limited additional federal aid, could threaten the successful implementation of this very ambitious law." In 2004 and 2005, the CEP made no more mention of fiscal crises, but left unchanged its finding that states can't implement NCLB without large spending increases. The later studies also acknowledge that NCLB is producing academic improvements, yet the schools still need more money and relaxed requirements. "Some supporters of the Act contend that early gains in state test scores mean that the Act is being administered effectively and is succeeding, so no changes are needed. Our intensive study of the Act for the last three years leads us to disagree."

These studies' factual claims and policy recommendations, which are their main purpose, have no scientific basis. They should be taken for what they are: the public school system's party line, not valid empirical research.

Quality Babysitting: Teaching Costs Extra

The CEP's other major line of research concerns high-school exit exams, on which it also produces an annual study, titled "State High School Exit Exams," and other publications. As with its NCLB research, the CEP's work on exit exams has useful aspects, including detailed information on state policies and regulations. Again, this will satisfy the wonks. The CEP has contributed reasonable discussion on secondary issues such as giving students who fail exit exams alternative ways to prove their academic proficiency. And it has been commendably principled on the question of whether exit exams increase dropout rates: The 2003 edition of its annual study snidely commented, "Exit exams are certainly not helping to *keep* students in school." However, as subsequent research produced new evidence that exit exams do not in fact increase dropout rates, the CEP moderated its stance to one of reasonable agnosticism.

But the exit exam studies are no more scientific than their NCLB cousins. In 2004 the CEP published its largest study of these exams, "Pay Now or Pay Later: The Hidden Costs of High School Exit Exams." The title sums it up: schools need more money to cover the "hidden" costs of living up to the expectations set by exit exams.

The CEP's central thesis is that while exit exams may appear to be inexpensive, they actually create the need for new spending by imposing on schools the burden of educating students to pass the test. "The direct costs of developing and administering the tests themselves represent a small share of the total costs of implementing a mandatory exit exam policy," says "Pay Now or Pay Later." "A realistic estimate of exam-related costs must also take into account the costs of remediation for students who fail exit exams or crucial state tests in earlier grades, as well as the 'hidden' costs of services needed to give students a substantial chance of passing these tests."

The assumption here is that exit exams impose new responsibilities on schools. In fact, exit exams are only holding schools accountable for teaching basic skills, always assumed to be their primary responsibility. The CEP view implies that schools are a babysitting service. You pay them $9,000 a year for 12 years to watch your child during the day. Teaching reading and math is an extra service, and it costs more.

Professional Judgment: Spend More

In "Pay Now or Pay Later," the CEP calculates the alleged hidden costs of exit exams using what is known as the "professional judgment" method. It assembled panels of educators and asked them what education services, in

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their professional judgment, a typical school district would need to reach two benchmarks: the current level of student performance on exit exams and a higher level of student performance that represents a desired goal. The CEP then calculates the costs of providing those services.

The professional judgment method does not rely on empirical data gathering or analysis of actual budgets. It is analogous to the method the CEP uses to study NCLB: ask the system what it thinks it needs, then report that figure as the amount needed. The calculations produced by the professional judgment method are more or less just speculation: expert speculation, to be sure, but speculation. Even the cost estimates for achieving current outcomes are speculative; the CEP asks its panels of experts to judge what "a hypothetical average school district" would have to spend to produce the current outcome levels.

The problem is that the experts have an overwhelming incentive to inflate their cost estimates, even if only unconsciously. It is only natural for education practitioners to believe that exit exams entail the need for lots of new, additional education services. And education practitioners know that higher cost estimates for complying with exit exams will produce a political impetus to spend more money on education practitioners.

One justification the CEP offers for the professional judgment method is that it "best reflects the experiences of people who are actually responsible for delivering education services" and "reflects the views of actual service providers." But that is exactly the problem: because they are the "actual service providers," the experts sitting on these panels cannot help but be affected by the financial incentives they face as employees of the school system.

Another justification the CEP offers is that the professional judgment method is "the most commonly used" for studying education resource needs. Unfortunately, this is all too true. Following the proliferation of "adequacy" lawsuits, studies using the professional judgment method to calculate how much it costs to provide an adequate education have become an explosive growth industry. (See "Pseudo-Science and a Sound Basic Education," *check the facts*, Fall 2005). The reason adequacy studies tend to prefer the professional judgment method is clear enough, and it does not seem like a stretch to suggest that the CEP might prefer that method for the very same reason.

"Pay Now or Pay Later" also states that "the cost estimates appear to be reliable within approximately 5–10 percent." How do they know this, given that their method involves no empirical data collection? "Panels in the same state with the same task but different members and a different moderator on a different day will often differ from the average by between 5 and 10 percent." In other words, the expert panels all reach results that are similar to one another, so therefore the results are "reliable."

Looking the Other Way

In the end, too many of the CEP's publications reflect poorly on the organization's ability to treat controversial issues fairly and face the empirical evidence squarely, the very qualities that induce major media outlets to seek Jennings and the CEP for their opinions.

It is no surprise, then, to discover that the CEP's take on school choice is as compromised as its views on other hot-button education issues. It does not produce a big annual study on school choice, but early in the debate it released a review of the existing research, "School Vouchers: What We Know and Don't Know ... and How We Could Learn More." The review found the evidence on vouchers to be "inconclusive," a result achieved only by throwing out all research on privately funded voucher programs, then declaring that the rest of the research produced "varying findings." In fact, there have been seven scientifically valid random-assignment analyses of voucher programs, and all seven found either that all voucher students perform significantly better than their nonvoucher contemporaries, or at least that most of them do (in some studies the results for black students, the majority of participants, are positive, while the results for other students fail to achieve statistical significance). There is room for legitimate discussion on the limits of the existing research on vouchers, but to describe the research as "inconclusive" is a gross misrepresentation.

The CEP has even published a history of public schooling, titled "Do We Still Need Public Schools?" that does to history what its other publications do to current events. For example, the report uses quotations from the American founders about the importance of education to suggest that the founders were "early supporters of public schools," which they were not. Public schools as we know them today didn't exist at the time, and the historical record makes clear that most of the founders would not have supported a government-owned and government-run school system.

If Jack Jennings and the Center on Education Policy want to publish their opinions and call them "research," that's their right. But social scientists, commentators, and journalists have a responsibility to distinguish between unfounded opinions and serious empirical research and to warn people when a study doesn't adhere to scientific standards. There's no hope for improving education policy if we don't keep the facts and evidence distinct from the public-school system's party (and often partisan) line.

Greg Forster is a senior fellow at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

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Sentences and Sensibilities

A Famous—and Dearly Departed—English Novelist Visits a Modern American High School

Jane Austen in Scarsdale: Or Love, Death, and the SATs

By Paula Marantz Cohen

St. Martin's Press, 2006, $23.95; 288 pages.

As reviewed by Diane Ravitch

What would Jane Austen write if she were chronicling life in an affluent suburb of New York City? How would she probe the social dilemmas of modern life among striving families? This is a problem neatly solved in Paula Marantz Cohen's new novel, *Jane Austen in Scarsdale: Or Love, Death, and the SATs*, which is loosely based on Austen's novel *Persuasion*. (Cohen's novel *Jane Austen in Boca*, a modern-day *Pride and Prejudice* in a Florida retirement community, is outrageously funny.) How better to investigate and satirize contemporary mores than through the eyes of a high-school guidance counselor who is juggling the demands of status-hungry parents and their anxious children?

In the Austen novel, the central character is Anne Elliot, the daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, a widower who has spent his family into near poverty; Anne is a spinster who years earlier had been persuaded by her snobbish family to abandon her true love because he was not up to their elevated social standards. In the Cohen novel, the central character is Anne Ehrlich, whose own family and personal history reflect the story of Jane Austen's Anne Elliot.

The big difference between the two novels, of course, is that Anne Ehrlich has a day job, which puts her in charge of college admissions at Fenimore High School. This is the process that stands at the very nexus of parental strivings and ambitions. To her office troop hordes of angry parents, insisting that she raise their child's grade-point average by a fraction of a point or that she classify their daughter as learning disabled so she can have extra time on the SATs or that she push their son to apply to the father's alma mater even though the boy lacks the grades to get in.

The Secret: Push and Package

Anyone who has any awareness of the pressure on high-school students to get into Ivy League colleges will enjoy this novel. I laughed out loud frequently as I read her fictional description of life in the guidance office at Fenimore High. Cohen has hit a bull's-eye in describing the lengths to which parents (and sometimes students) will go to gain entry to the best colleges, where applicants often have only a 10 percent chance of being admitted as freshmen.

Parents at Fenimore listen raptly as Curtis Fink of Fink and Fink Educational Consultants advises them on how to get their son or daughter into a top school. The secret, he says, is "push and package." Push them to study and do their work, but that's not enough. The real trick is packaging. Like the boy who was a couch potato who got into Haverford; the consultant said, I "gave him a political spin and turned him into the Westchester Gandhi." It is not good enough, he warns parents, for your child to be a music genius. If he makes all-state orchestra, that's still not good enough. He has to "cluster his assets" by joining a regional wind ensemble or a rock band that opens for Bruce Springsteen or tutoring underprivileged children in music or writing a music column for *Slate*. What about the child who has never won an honor or an award, asks a parent? Easy, says the consultant: get on the Internet and find contests in small literary magazines that no one reads. "Dig up the kid's old papers and submit them. If nothing else, you'll get a certificate of recognition that you can put down on the application. Admissions officers don't read these things too closely. If you're lucky, they'll think the kid won."

Anne Ehrlich has to contend with ambitious parents who want their children to get into top colleges regardless of the students own ability or interest. She keeps rocking chairs in her office, hoping that they will calm emotional supplicants. Some wealthy professionals try to bully her into writing letters that will help their children's chances at colleges they are unlikely to be admitted to. Others threaten litigation. This is a constant fear, since the previous head guidance counselor lost his job after he miscalculated a student's grade-point average and the parents sued and extracted a six-figure settlement from the school district.

The school principal is a decent man, but he too feels the pressure from parents and knows that his tenure depends on their good will. He is not above asking Anne to write a recommendation to Georgetown for a student whose parents are important in the local community, even though a more highly qualified student also wants to go to Georgetown but has "no parental muscle behind her." Both the guidance counselor and the principal know that Georgetown "has a habit of taking only one a year from Fenimore," and Anne absolutely refuses to undercut the deserving student.

As the book unfolds, we learn about "helicopter moms," who "hovered above [their] progeny ready to make a rapid, vertical landing at the slightest provocation," and "ripple kids," the ones whom

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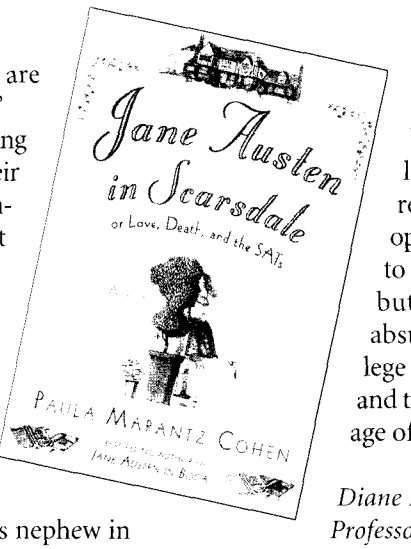
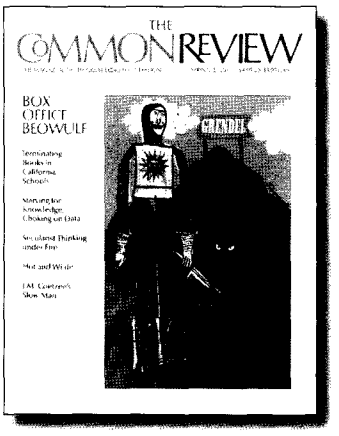
third-tier colleges eagerly seek out because their "coolness" and their aura as trendsetters will attract other students. The guidance counselor's office is stuffed with identical gorgeous brochures, all pitching "a unique educational experience." The community is brimming with franchise offices of Princeton Review, Stanley Kaplan, SAT tutors, and other purveyors of special courses to prepare students to beat the SATs. Students learn principles, strategies, and commandments. "The key to SAT taking is to skim," says one successful tutor, who has a line of Mercedes-Benzes and Lexuses outside his door. "If you start to concentrate on what the questions really mean, you'll realize how stupid they are and never get anywhere."

When Anne is not dealing with parents who want their child labeled as ADD (attention deficit disorder) to get extra privileges or with a student who is thinking of transferring to a nearby high school to improve her class ranking, she is coping with the shock of once again meeting her lost love, who has enrolled his nephew in Fenimore High School. As in a Jane Austen novel, all things work out for the best for the deserving, and Anne



Ehrlich eventually gets the man she had lost 13 years earlier. And we, gentle readers, get many opportunities not only to enjoy a good story, but to laugh at the absurdities of the college admissions process and to ponder the wreckage of academic values.

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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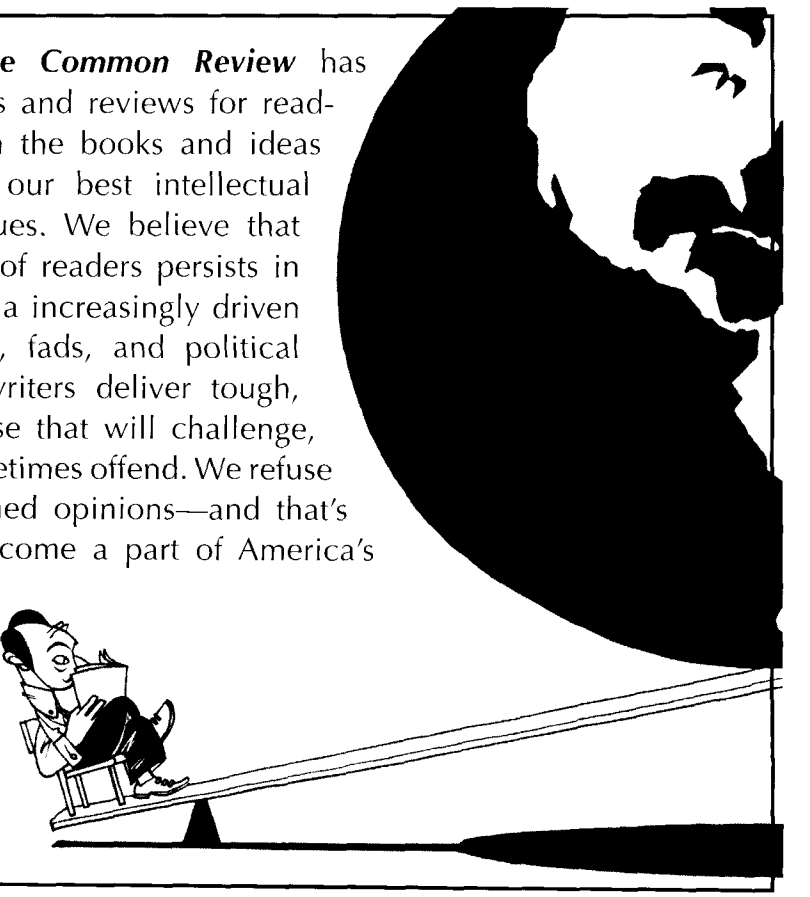

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The Reagan Revolution in Sweden

A Little Competition Comes to the Schools

The Market Comes to Education in Sweden: An Evaluation of Sweden's Surprising School Reforms.

By Anders Bjorklund, Melissa A. Clark, Per-Anders Edin, Peter Fredriksson, and Alan B. Krueger.

Russell Sage Foundation, 2005, $27.50; 157 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

It will undoubtedly be a surprise to many, as it was to me, that Sweden, a country with one of the most developed systems of government-provided social services, was swept up in the Reagan revolution. As the first words of this book remind us, "Sweden has long been known for its pursuit of equality—both equality of opportunity and equality of outcome." But as happened to Americans in the 1980s, the Swedes underwent a transformation in their thinking about the role of the government in society and that of the market in providing social services.

And in 1991 the Social Democratic party was replaced by a center-right coalition, which, according to *The Market Comes to Education in Sweden*, began to introduce "sweeping, market-oriented reforms in public education." Those reforms included measures that allowed private schools to compete with public schools, devolved authority for the public schools from the central government to local municipalities, and increased the variability in resources available to students in different municipalities. In other words, schooling in Sweden changed from being almost entirely public, uniform, and centralized to something much more like schooling in the United States. And these reforms persisted even after the Social Democrats regained power in 1994. Apparently the changes were popular.

The Market Goes to School

The reforms had begun under the Social Democrats in 1989, when controversial legislation "made local municipalities the main employers" of teachers. Passed after "a major political battle with the teachers unions," this reform allowed greater variability in teachers' pay. Detailed central regulations were also reduced. Localities had greater authority in expenditures and in programs, and independent schools expanded. Both changes increased the role of a "market" in schooling.

If families choose the community in which they will live in part on the basis of the quality of local schools, or if they can choose between competitive independent schools and public schools, a market is at work.

The meaning of such changes will differ from one country to another. No country shows the degree of residential mobility that the United States does, for example; but there is no hint in the book that people in Sweden actually move and select communities on the basis of the presumed quality of schools, as we know they do to some degree in the United States. It is also not clear just what kind of independence the independent schools have, what they are like, and what motivates people to choose them. They are, we are told, "publicly funded but privately run," something like our charter schools. Thus choosing them is not inhibited (apparently) by additional costs, as is true for private schools in the United States.

But what reasons lead parents to choose private schools? We are told that the percentage of students in independent schools rose from 1 percent in 1991 to 6 percent in 2002; apparently there was little call—or market—for private schools before the reforms. It is not clear what these independent schools offer. In the United States (where some 13 percent of schoolchildren attend private or charter schools), independent schools are predominantly religious. But with no large Catholic, conservative Christian, or Jewish population in Sweden and no evidence presented in this book of discontent with public schools, one wonders who the main clients of private schools in Sweden are. The authors' account of the social and education situation in Sweden, and what actually happened and why, is too brief to give a clear picture.

An Inconclusive Conclusion

The authors, all labor economists, are more interested in the demonstrated effects of the changes they sketch than in a fuller examination and characterization of the reforms. The major substantive chapters of the book place Swedish expenditure and achievement in comparative perspective (in both, Sweden rates high); show that the decline in education inputs during the 1990s worsened the teacher-student ratio and teacher quality; review the international research on the effects of school choice; and test for the effects of school choice in Sweden on achievement. The authors find the effects are small but not negative. They report that children with highly educated parents are more likely to attend independent schools, but so, confusingly, are immigrants.

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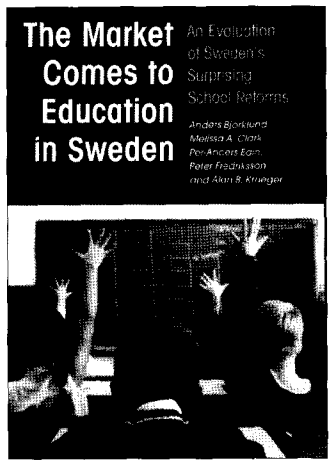

"We are all empirical labor economists," the authors write (they are the common authors of the book), and "we are inclined to focus on measurable aspects of what schools produce." This is a highly technical work. And it demonstrates the well-known generalization in the evaluation of social programs: the more meticulous and professional the research, the fewer clear and sharp effects are to be found. Though at least one of the authors (Krueger) is a known skeptic of vouchers, they do not tip their hands here. This is not an ideological work. The overall conclusion is that neither the negative effects one could have feared, nor the positive effects one could have hoped for, were large.

The negative effects are those one would expect in a market system: an increase in inequality, unequal educational achievement, and unequal wages in adult life. But in Sweden both the profile of educational achievement and the profile of earnings is, by American standards, remarkably compressed and remains so. Neither the heights nor the depths are to be found. On the whole, Sweden, like the Scandinavian and smaller countries of northern Europe generally, does very well in international tests of educational achievement—so well that one wonders why any great change was considered necessary at all.

As the authors explain, one reason for the change was that Sweden's expenditure on education was relatively high; as a percentage of national income, as high as that in the United States. And with an economic crisis in the 1990s the question was, Could we manage as well by spending less? Indeed, Swedish expenditures did go down, teachers' salaries showed relative decline, and class size increased. But there is an irony in judging the "efficiency" of Swedish education in the way economists measure it—by differential economic return related to amount of and expenditure on education—since the efficiency of education in a society in which the wage level is compressed by powerful union and other institutional pressures will inevitably appear low.

The Land of the Free Lunch No Longer

Among the book's more "robust" conclusions, to use the economists' term, is that the high Swedish expenditure on adult education (which is very well developed in Sweden, as a resource for unemployed workers and as a way of upgrading or changing one's credentials) is not warranted by its returns: But how could it be, when, we learn, "individuals received student pay [all students are paid in Sweden—part of the commitment to equality] at the level of unemployment benefits, which in Sweden replace up to 80 percent of forgone earnings." Wonderful Sweden! At that cost, one would have to get very good returns indeed to demonstrate that adult education pays.

One of the most interesting and useful aspects of the book to the American reader is the review of research on the effects of competition and decentralization around the world, from New Zealand to Chile. One learns that the no-holds-barred conflicts that have erupted over these issues among researchers in the United States are to be found even in placid Sweden.

One finding does seem to stand up across societies: more resources will help immigrants and those who do worse in school. "The academic achievement of students from disadvantaged families is more susceptible to variations in resources than that of students from advantaged families." The disadvantaged in Sweden are of course much less disadvantaged than those in the United States. Foreign-born students attend private schools in somewhat higher proportions than native born. But what this means in the Swedish context is not clear, as is true for this reader, of many of the findings of this book.

The general story is clear. "Our overriding conclusion is that the effects of the education reforms have been exaggerated by both sides," write the authors. "The reforms did increase the efficiency of the school system," as measured by results as related to costs. But the increase was modest, and "the disparities in achievement resulting from the reforms were also modest.... But by and large the newly decentralized, choice-driven system has had small positive effects on the academic performance of most Swedish students."

The authors do not suggest going back to the earlier, more uniform, less competitive system. But they are studying the effect of a rather constrained and hardly vigorous market, as far as one can tell. Unleashed, the market might well have greater effects, on both efficiency and equality.

Nathan Glazer is professor of education and sociology emeritus at Harvard University.

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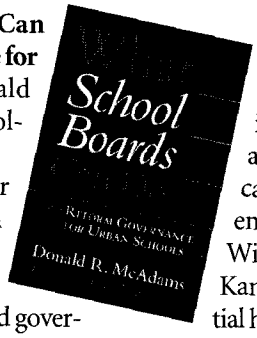
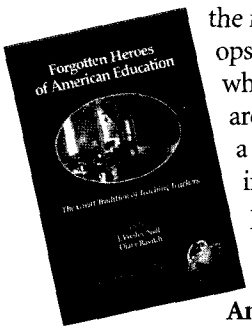


What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools. Donald McAdams (Teachers College Press).

Don McAdams, founder of the Center for Reform of School Systems, may be the nation's leading authority on school-board governance. In an earlier book, he detailed the travails and lessons of his 12 years on the Houston school board, a tenure in which he partnered with former U.S. secretary of education Rod Paige and others to drive an ambitious urban reform agenda. Since departing from the Houston board in 2002, McAdams has worked with dozens of school boards and run institutes that train new and veteran board members to make a difference. In this book, McAdams sketches out his grand unified theory of "reform governance," explaining what school-board members should and should not do. McAdams teaches members how to develop a coherent theory of change, establish effective work routines, monitor performance outcomes, and translate their ideas into sensible policy. Drawing on his own experiences as a board member and consultant and on dozens of examples provided by his friends and colleagues across the nation, McAdams develops an essential text for those who believe school boards are not an anachronism but a potentially valuable ally in the struggle to improve public schooling.

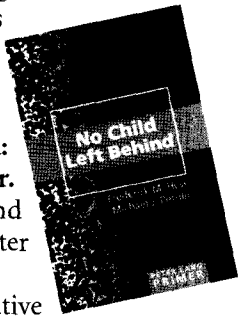


Forgotten Heroes of American Education: The Great Tradition of Teaching Teachers. Edited by J. Wesley Null and Diane Ravitch (Information Age Publishing).

In the foreword to *Forgotten Heroes* Diane Ravitch explains, "When I was a graduate student in the early 1970s, working toward a doctorate in the history of education at Teachers College, I never encountered the names or ideas of William Chandler Bagley or Isaac Kandel. Instead, I imbibed ... a partial history of our nation's educational efforts, based on the view that American education was and always would be American progressivism writ large." In this compendium, Ravitch and J. Wesley Null set out to rectify that state of affairs. In an impressive collection of writings that span the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, they portray a view of American education thought that is fundamentally different from that often encountered in the nation's leading schools of education. Covering topics including student discipline, teacher education, curriculum, the influence of John Dewey, the science of education, and the purpose of schooling, the essays capture a compelling but often overlooked body of thought that resisted the tenets of progressivism and faddism. The editors augment each selection with a brief introduction to the author and a helpful discussion of the essay, enabling the novice as well as the historian to negotiate this valuable collection.

Mayhem in the Middle: How Middle Schools Have Failed America—and How to Make Them Work. Cheri Pierson Yecke (Fordham Foundation).

This brief monograph takes a hard look at the phenomenon of middle schools (housing grades 5–8 or 6–8), arguing that an infatuation with student personal development and "socialization" has transformed these institutions into academic backwaters. Observing that some middle schools, like the KIPP academies, have enjoyed enormous success by focusing on academics and establishing a culture of high expectations, Florida education commissioner Cheri Yecke seeks to overturn the conception of middle schooling that derides the importance of academic instruction. Yecke argues that modern practice took root in the 1970s and 1980s as a consequence of "plateau learning theory." This theory, that brain growth slows during the middle-school years, combined with an undue concern for nonacademic considerations to produce the modern middle school. Criticizing both the scientific basis and the results of the middle-school concept, Yecke calls for establishing higher academic standards, shifting toward K–8 schools, and expanding the availability of advanced courses for students in grades 6 to 8.



No Child Left Behind: Peter Lang Primer. Frederick M. Hess and Michael J. Petrilli (Peter Lang Publishing).

Education Next executive editor Frederick Hess and Michael J. Petrilli, formerly a Bush administration official in the U.S. Department of Education, have written a long-overdue citizens guide to No Child Left Behind. The book is admirably concise, weighing in at fewer than 140 pages, or just one-fifth the length of its sprawling subject, the historic federal education law signed by President Bush in January of 2002. In clear language, the authors

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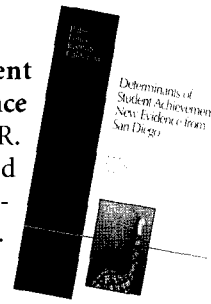
describe the law's key provisions, explain how they were intended to work, and provide up-to-date accounts of their implementation. Each chapter also provides a helpful glossary of key terms. Intended not as a defense, a critique, or an evaluation of NCLB, the book fairly presents praise and criticism of the controversial law from both the left and the right. While readers hoping for advice on what to make of these debates may wish its usually opinionated authors had been less restrained in sharing their views, those seeking a solid foundation on which to base their own opinions will find no better place to start.



Determinants of Student Achievement: New Evidence from San Diego. Julian R. Betts, Andrew C. Zau, and Lorien A. Rice (Public Policy Institute of California). California's new secretary of education, Alan Bersin, handpicked for the job by Arnold Schwarzenegger, had, as San Diego's superintendent for almost seven years (1998–2005), initiated an aggressive set of school reforms. Under Bersin's bold leadership, the district mounted a multifaceted effort to raise student literacy and numeric competence. San Diego's math and reading scores climbed significantly, showing gains that outstripped those made elsewhere in California. The improvement in the scores of disadvantaged students was especially large report the authors of this careful, objective study.

As successful as Bersin was, however, the story is ultimately discouraging. In 2005 he was pushed out of office after teacher unions led a drive against the reform-minded board members who had recruited him. *Determinants of Student Achievement* is technical, but the political tale surrounding the study has large implications.

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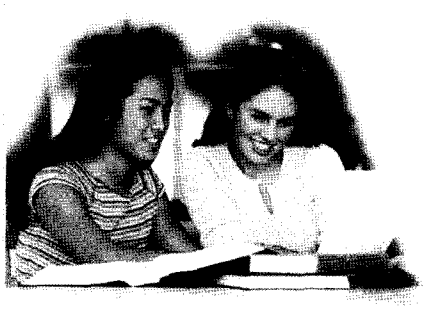

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Leaving "School" Out of High School

The Winding Road to Academic Excellence

BY NIKI LEFEBVRE

Our training shoes quietly slapped the rubbery surface of the track as we barreled down the final stretch. One by one we crossed the line and doubled over, desperate to catch our breath. Despite the burning in my lungs from the cold autumn air, I felt great. I had been in college for only a few weeks and was keeping pace with some of the older, veteran runners. Unfortunately, off the track, in the classroom, I wasn't even keeping up with the other freshmen. After practice that night, despite the chill in the air, I took the longest possible route back to my dorm, dreading the research paper and the mountain of books and journal articles and notes and outlines that had littered my desk for weeks. I was just beginning my first semester of college and already knew I was unprepared.

"How did you do it in high school?" asked my roommate, a graduate of a New Mexico prep school. *How did I do it in high school?* I didn't. In my public high school, a small school in rural Massachusetts, I was a conscientious student with a straight-A average. But I never had to write a 12-page research paper. In fact, in high school I spent a lot more time on the track and engaged in other pursuits than I did studying. I was captain of the varsity cross-country and track teams, a class officer, president of the National Honor Society. I volunteered at a local women's shelter, represented the student body on the town school committee, worked at a craft store. I was a Girl Scout.

School was something else. Even in my Advanced Placement courses I did not have to write research papers. My classes rarely required me to fit even an hour of homework into my afternoon schedule, and doing homework on the weekends was an anomaly at best. As I tried to settle in at college, I began to realize that high school had involved very little *school.* None of my assignments ever required much time or effort, nor did "big" assignments occur frequently enough that I had to pare back my long list of after-school activities. Far more often than not, a 45-minute study period provided me with sufficient time to complete the day's assignments satisfactorily.

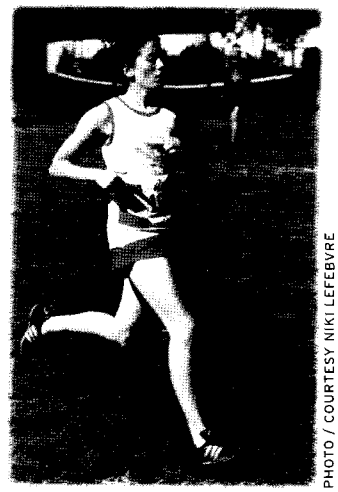

PHOTO / COURTESY NIKI LEFEBVRE

As I tried to settle in at college, I began to realize that high school had involved very little school.

No Records, No Goals

At my first high-school track practice, the coach gave everyone a list of school records. He challenged us to break them throughout the season. I had six classes on my first day of high school and didn't receive one list of records to break, standards to meet, or goals to achieve.

That's why college was a shock. My high-school transcript may have been filled with As, but I quickly learned that an A in college cost much more. The five-paragraph essays, multiple-choice exams, and short homework assignments required by my high school didn't fill my pockets with much college currency. And I wasn't alone in being so broke.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Indiana University High School Survey for Student Engagement, the majority of high-school students spend three hours or less on homework each week, and the majority of those students reported earning As and Bs. Only 22 percent of the 1.2 million high-school graduates who took the ACT Assessment in 2004 achieved scores that would deem them ready for college in English, math, or science.

When did *school* get pushed out of high school? Most students will do what is expected of them, but so often more is expected on the athletic fields, in after-school clubs and jobs, in volunteer organizations, and in social circles than in the classroom. School must be more of a priority in high school if students are to succeed in college and beyond.

Niki Lefebvre, a 2005 honors graduate in history and philosophy from Mount Holyoke College, is currently director of the Concord Review Society.

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